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Till thou change names, and be where he began.”

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VOL. I.

LONDON :

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,  
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1873.

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To the revered Memory of  
GEORGE PEABODY, ESQUIRE;  
And to all bountiful, though unknown givers,  
Who delight in the expenditure of their incomes,  
Not on self, but in self-denying benevolence:—  
Who, as God's faithful stewards, and loving the riches of  
Heaven only,  
Abhor parsimony and apathy,  
Because of which the lives of many are shortened,  
And the homes of many are made desolate:—  
To all who are rich towards God  
In their large-hearted thoughtfulness  
For the needs of their brethren:  
To whom their wealth is not a curse, but a blessing,  
These pages are dedicated by one who would offend none:  
But who believes in his mission to speak the truth  
And to lay bare a great iniquity,  
Even at the cost of offending many.



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# FROST AND THAW.

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## CHAPTER I.

HARVEST: FROM TWO SIDES OF A VERANDAH.

A SULTRY August sun was bathing hill and valley, wood and water, in a far-reaching sea of golden light. The open country round the Poplars is highly picturesque, without being bold or grand in any of its features—a landscape situated in the heart of a rich agricultural country, undulating gracefully away as far as the eye can reach, sharply broken up here and there into little sequestered dells,

that lie below the level of the commonly-travelled roads, through which the shallow trout-stream ripples along, and whose overhanging limestone sides have their bare fronts relieved in places by patches of soft moss, clusters of wild flowers, and stunted, but hardy shrublets, that contrive to wear a flourishing aspect, despite the exposure of a great part of their roots and the thinness of the soil beneath them. On this particular day, which in its progress had reached the fourth hour after noon, the chief objects of interest to the eye were groups of harvesters at work among the ripe corn—men and women of well-knit frames and healthy faces. But for their cheery voices, and the grating sounds that reached the ear, as they sharpened their scythes, the stillness around would have been intense. At the distance of about six miles from the country house just referred to, rise, in the hollow, the towers and spires and tall chimneys of Lowchester, a thriving manu-

facturing town of some thirty thousand inhabitants. It is the only place of any importance that can be seen from the aforesaid point of observation. Here and there, over the wide expanse of scenery around, little country hamlets nestle closely under the simple tower or spire, as the case may be, of the village churches in the neighbourhood, and a few gentlemen's seats and more or less substantial-looking farm houses are within range of observation. All else, except at this harvest time, and when at intervals during the day the passing railway trains noisily emerge from some deep embankment, or short tunnel near, is sleepy and still. In a word, you are in the heart, just there, of one of those sweet pastoral landscapes which the eyes of any ardent admirer of nature are never tired of contemplating, and which are the glory and the beauty of old England.

The *Poplars* is a square-built house of comfortable dimensions, seated high and dry

in the midst of two or three acres of hilly ground, and protected, to a considerable extent, from wintry winds by a belt of trees that grow on the same level with the building, and on the surrounding slopes. Such a house can have been the result of no ambition for architectural display. It is simply solid, capacious, and comfortable. Whether or not the possessor of it in past years had sufficient taste to discern that as it then stood there was a certain barrenness of outline, and a bleak aspect about it, which called for some improvement on the original structure, is not known, but a few years before this tale opens he had surrounded his habitation with a green verandah, to which the good taste of his wife then added a net-like trellis work that ran round three of the four sides, and made of the verandah a very paradise of sweets and gay colours in the summer, on account of the flowers that bloom there in plenteous profusion. Since

that time this good lady has left a state where summers wane away, and flowers wither on their stems, for the more congenial clime where “decay’s effacing fingers” can work their work of mischief no more.

Geoffry Wilmot, the present owner of the Poplars, had reached the age, when our story opens, of Shakespeare’s “lean and slippered pantaloons,” and, to judge from appearances, was little likely to descend the down-hill of life much longer before reaching its foot. In character not particularly estimable he was of that type of mankind who, whenever they sink out of observation, are not likely to leave a gap in society behind them which there is any difficulty in filling up. He had never converted his neighbours into friends, in the strict sense of the word, for so far from being of a sociable turn of mind, he was, by nature, grave and reserved. The companionship of such a man, in a long walk, on a rainy day, and through uninteresting scenes, would

have been to you the very acmé of boredom. He had no conversational powers, had a despondent air about him that repelled social intercourse, was not unfrequently snappish when crossed in his inclinations, and too selfish to enter very deeply into the affairs of other people. He was only not shunned altogether because it was his lot to possess a daughter on whom society lavished its kindest attentions. The ogre was petted and caressed, because society, in love for the beauty who dwelt under the same roof with him, felt it necessary, for the sake of intercourse with her, to keep him at least approachable and on speaking terms. Hardy was the beggar who wound his way up the secluded slopes of Mr. Wilmot's shrubbery to the hall or kitchen door to ask for charitable dole ; hardy the gentleman or gentlewoman who, with the interests of the poor in heart, ventured to ask him to dip into his coffers for the relief of their necessities. Geoffry Wilmot

might perchance have held you by the button for a quarter of an hour while he chatted about his own affairs, but had you once sought to divert conversation with him into another channel, silence for the remainder of the interview or a snappish retort would have conveyed to you the intimation that you had reached the bottom of his sympathies, and were likely to waste time in proposing to continue your call upon him any longer.

Geoffry Wilmot had become dreamy, abstracted, taciturn, to a degree uncommon in him before, since the death of his wife. One of his amiable traits had been a decided love for her, and therefore her womanly influence had thrown the sun upon his colder moods, and softened his harder one a little. But when that sun of her wifely tenderness for him set behind the green hillock in the neighbouring churchyard, his nature's coldness and hardness lost that which had been the chief agent in brightening and humanizing

it before. No blame to his daughter Marion that such was the case. On the hard stock of his rougher, sterner nature had been grafted an offshoot of a gentler, nobler kind, and Marion was the one flower that resulted from that union. Of a warm, affectionate temperament, she did her utmost to fill up the void in her father's happiness which had been caused by her mother's death. But her filial advancements met with but little encouragement. The old man sulked silently over his loss, shewed no disposition to accept the consolations his daughter would fain have offered him, and barred himself in from her in his own moody, desponding spirit. What could that daughter do but leave him at last to the society of his own thoughts? At first she had tried to win him back to a more cheerful tone of mind by reading to him, by exercising her skill in music and singing for his benefit, or by strolling with him through the grounds, or in the sequestered lanes. But he never

rallied sufficiently from his dejection to estimate at their right value her efforts to restore his mind to composure and content. And the time came at last when Paralysis deepened his dejection of look, rendered his speech indistinct, and reduced him to the necessity of taking exercise in his Bath-chair only. He had the reputation, among some of his neighbours, of being a man of considerable wealth, which was not lessened by a certain habit he possessed of demanding that his vehicle, when he took the air, should be placed in one particular spot under the verandah, whence he could just see more or less indistinctly, in the dim distance, two or three tall chimneys attached to the manufactory in Lowchester of which he was still master, though his business there was conducted by a confidential foreman who came, periodically, to the Poplars on all necessary occasions, and always left him again after a brief stay. There were, indeed, one or two of the neighbours who cunningly

surmised that Mr. Wilmot's partiality for the sight of his distant chimneys, taken in connection with his dejected air, sprang from an inward but never expressed conviction that matters were not prospering with him in that quarter, but other evidence, internal and external, combined to place them in a decided minority in point of numbers. It was opined that his foreman, Mr. Hardiman—so far, at least, as was evident on the upper surface of things—enjoyed his confidence to the fullest extent ; and even the minority, who did not often venture to speak of Mr. Hardiman a disparaging word outside the sacred and confidential home-circle, never went so far as to imagine that the old gentleman, from his favourite resting place in the open air at the Poplars, was able to direct his glance down the tall chimney, and into the penetralia of his head clerk's counting-house, so as to watch his movements therein ; yet still, without very well knowing why, they adhered to

their first impression with tolerable steadfastness.

As the families near, who were on visiting terms at the Poplars, were nearly unanimous in their regard for Marion Wilmot, and as it was, at least, generally felt that she was likely to be comfortably provided for by her father, it came to pass, in the course of nature, that some of the young men with whom she met, and who felt the power of her attractions, began to speculate on their probable chances of success in an effort to gain possession of her for life. The aforesaid swains, however, were, for the most part, not deficient in the bump of caution. Though Marion was decidedly a beauty and of the sweet age of nineteen, they made no hot assault upon the citadel, but contented themselves by watching at their leisure for its more assailable points of attack, and seemed intent rather on mining their way in than on summoning the garrison, in love's formal way, to surrender at discretion. The reader shall

have her portrait, in a pen-and-ink sketch, and he may then perchance wonder that even in this fortune-hunting age, the possession of our heroine was not a matter more warmly contended for.

Marion Wilmot was, in stature, taller than women generally are, and, in figure, proportionately graceful. Her complexion inclined to the brunette. She had brown eyes, bright, and full of expression ; dark brown hair ; a shapely head, which the phrenologist would have pronounced to be of an intellectual order by no means low, and which was poised on a full, symmetrical throat and neck. Her brow was of the high, thoughtful type. Her mouth was small, and not a little fascinating when she smiled. I am far from saying that my heroine was faultlessly beautiful : I will not attempt to deny that women are to be met with who are superior to her in personal attractions. The reader will perhaps forgive me if I say they are few.

On this particular August afternoon three people were engaged in looking forth upon the harvest from different points of the verandah at the Poplars. Geoffry Wilmot's eyes rested on it with a moody thoughtfulness from time to time, as though there were associations with it in his mind that contrasted a little unpleasantly with his abstracted gaze in the direction of his beloved chimneys in the town of Lowchester. When a man has had but a hair-breadth escape himself of falling victim to the grim harvester, who spares neither flowers nor bearded grain, it is most likely that, as he marks the work of the sickle and glances at the fallen grain, and at the operation of binding it into sheaves, he will find himself confronted by thoughts graver in their character than those which would naturally visit the minds of all young and hopeful observers of such scenes. On the opposite side of the verandah Marion was pacing up and down by the side of Philip Harvey, a

gentleman only a year or two older than herself, who shewed his face at the Poplars with a frequency much commented upon, and whose visits certainly appeared to be productive of no sort of annoyance to Marion herself. That he came to see Mr. Wilmot was unlikely, for sometimes he exchanged scarcely half-a-dozen words with him. To Marion he had never spoken of love, but he sought her society, and they walked and chatted together, outwardly, to all appearance, as a brother and sister, *very* much attached to each other, might walk and talk together. The world drew its own conclusions—to the effect that Philip Harvey was winning, if he had not already won the heart that others coveted to win, and that the others with whom he had started in the love-chase had but a miserable prospect of reaching the goal before him.

Philip Harvey and Marion Wilmot had played together from childhood upwards. Five years before, when Mrs. Wilmot was

alive, there had been occasionally private theatricals at the Poplars, when Marion had personated Ophelia to Philip's Hamlet. She was proficient as a performer on the piano-forte, and he was not the worst of violin-players. Their musical tastes were similar, and all agreed that, in singing, their voices blended harmoniously together. Philip had once thought of entering the medical profession, and was better versed in botany than Marion was, and hence it is not to be wondered at that the lady, in her passion for flowers, should now and then avail herself of the gentleman's scientific skill in determining the botanical descent and properties of her favourites. But talk as he might and as he did of a hundred other things, he did not talk to Marion of love. They were mutually fascinated with each other's society, and the truth must be confessed that, on the lady's side, although the fact was admirably concealed from the gentleman, there existed an

element warmer than mere friendship, which others of his sex would thankfully have drawn forth from her towards themselves. Philip Harvey had been told that he was playing with Marion Wilmot's heart, and yet he sought her society again and again, but had not as yet spoken to her on other than indifferent topics. He knew that others envied him the easy *entrée* he possessed to her society. He was by no means insensible to the charms of her person, and felt gratified by the deference she paid to his intellectual acquirements, and attracted by her very kindly reception of him on all occasions.

This is all that can be said at present of the intimate friendship that had sprung up between them. To their younger hearts, as they paced up and down under the verandah on the side directly opposite to that Mr. Wilmot occupied, the scenes of harvest around suggested no dreary thoughts of life. They looked forward to a harvest of earthly joy yet

to come, and dreamt of no blight or disappointment in the matter. But Marion, in her ideal harvest of joy, yet future, thought more of Philip Harvey as a hoped-for sharer in it, than he had insight enough to suspect or freedom enough from vacillation of purpose to have reciprocated, had he even known much that was often passing in his fair companion's thoughts. They were sailing side by side together over a summer-sea, but to Marion there would have been nothing of the brightness, and the calm and the laughter-like ripple of summer on its waters, if Philip had not been by her side, while, for aught he knew as yet, Philip could have floated along on as fair a summer-sea, with any other lovely maiden by his side, provided that her attractions equalled those of Marion Wilmot, and that, like her, she would prefer his society to that of the rest of his sex.

## CHAPTER II.

## JOHN HARDIMAN'S TEMPTATION.

JOHN HARDIMAN lived, with his wife and family, somewhere about the middle of a row of decent brick houses in the town of Low-chester, at the distance of about half a mile from the manufactory in which the working-hours of the day were spent. His dwelling faced the river that flows through the town, which is of sufficient depth in that part of its course to allow vessels of no great tonnage to float between it and the sea.

John Hardiman, in his position at Mr. Wilmot's works in Lowchester, was very much like a horse harnessed to a vehicle not suited to him. He was entirely a self-made man, thrown on the wide world early in life by the death of his father, a soldier, who had fallen abroad in the service of his country. His genius was rather for invention, for striking out new paths in commerce, than for steadily plodding on along the old ones. He had been many years in Mr. Wilmot's employ, and during the latter part of his time at Lowchester had hankered after some radical change in his circumstances. He had grown weary of working on in the old grooves. By nature and education he was much better fitted for mechanical than for purely financial pursuits. He had in his position at Lowchester been successful in so modifying the machinery used as to render it possible to do a greater amount of work with fewer hands,

and to turn that work out with a better finish. In days when his head was clearer, and his health better, Geoffry Wilmot had recognised his foreman's improvements, and paid to him a pecuniary recompense for them. But as years rolled on, and the master profited greatly by his servant's inventions, the latter allowed the feeling to remain uppermost day by day that the acknowledgment he had received was one ill-proportioned to his own deserts and to the increase in income his master must have derived from the improvements he had effected. There was much in John Hardiman's domestic circle that was calculated to keep alive this spirit of discontent in his mind, and incite him to do better for himself than he was doing. He had married early in life, the olive-branches around his table were numerous, his wife might yet make additions to their number, his own life he felt to be uncertain, and, at present, it was

utterly impossible for him to make the provision for his family, in the event of his decease, which he coveted to make.

He was untutored, and roughly versed enough in mechanics as a scientific study, but was not insensible to the fact that, despite his shortcomings as to a theoretical knowledge of the subject, he had contrived to succeed better and to make a few happy practical hits in his experimental dabblings with the said science. And with an ambition one can easily enough understand in a man conscious of his superiority in head-piece to the rest of his fellow-workmen, and with a wife and large family to pull through the world with himself, he was wont to say that he thought he ought to be able to do more than leave a sovereign or two behind him to put him decently under the ground with. He was right. Not a few friends fell in with his notions, in his grumbling moods, as they imbibed the social glass together (and his wife, a hard-working, sensible, and

withal rather ambitious woman, was at one with them in this matter), that the least thing Mr. Wilmot could do was to receive him into partnership. And after much consultation and private ponderings, John screwed up his courage, and resolved to approach his master on this subject—paralysis and tendency to snappishness in that gentleman notwithstanding.

The dreaded interview had now been achieved, the delicate point had been mooted, and Mr. Wilmot, being at the time out of humour, had returned an indefinite and unsatisfactory answer. He “would take time to consider about it, and let John Hardiman know.” So said the master, and John had patiently waited on the hooks of suspense so many weeks for the final reply, that, after having been encouraged, first of all by the delay, as indicating the possibility that the old gentleman was gravely thinking the proposition over, poor Hardiman had come at last to

the conclusion that the matter had altogether escaped his master's memory. On the night before the presenting of his petition, there had been a solemn deliberation between himself and his wife, who was considerably better skilled in "the art of putting things" than he was, as to the language he should make use of in trying to carry his point. John and Mary Hardiman were the very opposite of each other in the matter of facing a difficulty. John was contemplative, Mary was prompt and active. John was hindered, by a constitutional timidity of mind, and infirmity of purpose, from taking any very important step towards his probable self-advancement. Mary was bolder of speech, and could be wily or outspoken as the occasion might require. She was the woman who would have found words to argue their common cause, had they even resolved to ask Geoffry Wilmot to retire from the business altogether, and hand over all his vested interests therein to his foreman. Mary

had got John up on the aforesaid evening as a special pleader, and, having, as she fondly thought "learned his lesson tolerably well," he had clothed the matter nearest to their hearts in the most attractive possible dress they could find for it. John, as instructed by his wife, was to pretend to lose himself and his own interests as far as possible, in his great concern for the extension of Mr. Wilmot's business, and in his anxious regard for Mr. Wilmot's greater prosperity. He was to speak of the business as though it were a thing of life, going off in a rapid consumption, pining away for its want of an active, energetic partner. With as much of refined delicacy and skill as he could muster for the purpose, he was to depict the possible consternation and dismay that would be likely to take possession of all rivals in the same way of trade at the sight of a large new brass plate bearing the wedded names "Wilmot and Hardiman," on the chief office door. He

was just to hint, by way of a clincher, and, if he could manage to hide a slice of onion in his pocket-handkerchief, with something like a tear in his eye, that a rival seemed to be on the point of offering him a partnership, but that he could not think, after so many years of faithful, and, as he trusted, valuable service, of deserting his old master. He was then to draw Mr. Wilmot's attention, quite incidentally, and as a matter of minor moment, to the duty of a husband and a father, to the wife and ten children dependent upon him, after he had had such overtures, "in esse or in posse," made to him; and he was to wind up by the representation that the having a partner would be the means of Mr. Wilmot's rejuvenescence in a sanitary point of view, and would add largely to Miss Marion's fortune, and that he really was anxious to devote to his old master, and to none other, the mechanical knowledge he might possess, unless his paramount duty as a husband and

a father should lead him regretfully to accept the offer from another which Mr. Wilmot might not choose to make. His wife had worked up a very strong case for him, and she and he quite chuckled over the presentiment of success that had come over both of them before they went to bed that night. But whether it was that John blundered in his special pleading, or that the old gentleman was suffering from dyspepsia during the interview, or that he was obstinate from any other cause, certain it is that he did not carry his point. Mr. Wilmot had only stared, compressed his lips, and looked a most unaccommodating look, whose effect on his spirits was little mollified by the promise connected with it that he would turn it over in his mind. And soon it came to pass that he did turn it over in his mind, just when John Hardiman was deep in his conviction that he had forgotten the subject altogether, and that with little preface or comment, to

his disappointment and disgust, he had settled the matter against him.

It was on a certain rainy Saturday afternoon in August, that Mr. Wilmot had rather bluntly and curtly refused to think any longer of John Hardiman's proposition, and the foreman had returned on that day to the manufactory, heavy and displeased. He paid the workmen their wages, and then walked home, took off his soaked great coat, dried himself at the fire, and sat down at the window in the front room opposite the river to think. There his wife found him on her return from a brief gossip at a neighbour's, looking moodily at the barges on the river, as one would look under the influence of an acute attack of melancholia. Mary was quick in her powers of mental sight, and seldom wasted words.

“ Hey, John, what, have you had it out, then? Has the old master said anything? ”

“ Said anything? He’s only knocked all our fine planning and scheming on the head, and that, too, just in the teeth of another contrivance I’ve made this last day or two, which will lessen the wages he has to pay.”

“ An’ have you been fool enough, then, to tell him your contrivance?”

“ No, but I might ha’ done it, if he hadn’t stopped me.”

“ How stopped you?”

“ Oh, he said quite savagely he couldn’t afford to do better for me than he is doing, an’ didn’t care what became of the business after his death, as long as I kept it up during his life.”

“ No! did he say that? Well I never! There’s gratitude! If that’s all he thinks about an old servant it’s a pity; but it’ll come home to him yet!”

“ May be; but what’s that to do with you or me?”

“ Nay, John, we shall be the better for it

somehow, I'se warrant; but tell us, lad, about this contrivance."

"Oh, it's nothin' but makin' one machine an' one set o' tools finish the same bit o' work that it's taken two sets to do it with afore-time, and a saving in time and labour, too."

"Have you tried it?"

"Tried it? Aye!"

"And it answers?"

"Of course it answers. I shouldn't ha' told you about it if it hadn't."

"Well, look ye there now! And you to pine and fret all your days trying to fill his pocket and never getting so much as a 'thank you' for it! I ain't a man, it's true, but if I was it's a thing I wouldn't put up with at any cost, that I wouldn't."

"What is one to do?"

"Do? why set your wits to work, to be sure! He never comes near the factory, you know. He leaves it very much to you to take on fresh hands or discharge them as do no

good. You can't, after all, John, have as clear a head as some on us have if you don't know what to do in such a matter."

"I have set my wits to work, haven't I? An' what's the good of it if I'm to toil and slave as an under-strapper all my life, when a little capital would make ladies and gentlemen of us all?"

"Of course it would! Then do you get the capital, that's my advice."

If Mary had told her husband to go up to the skies, and get the moon down, he could not have stared at her, as she spoke, more than he did; but as he knew her to be a woman above the average of her sex for sharpness of wit, and that there were few emergencies she could not grapple with, in one way or another, the stare presently gave way to a look of questioning curiosity.

"Now look ye here, John, things has come to that pass with us that they must be mended. There ain't a woman under the

sun as toils and slaves more than I do, and I ain't so young as I used to be, and can't toil and slave so much longer. It ain't fit that I should do it, and I know you don't like to see me do it. But, slave as I do, I can't make both ends meet. We're getting more and more into debt, and it's a thing that don't suit my book, and I shall get desperate if it isn't altered. Now look here; you're not the man to deny that your first duty is to your wife and children, not to an old miserly wretch (for wretch he is) who would have you work your finger-bones away and give you nothing for it, if he could help it. 'Everyone for himself, and God for us all!' That's a blessed old saying, John ! It's a rare good un. Do you be for yourself, and me, and the children."

"What's the good of talking in that way ? As if I wasn't working all day long for you and the children!"

"Well, I didn't mean to say you wasn't.

But don't interrupt me. You don't want to leave Wilmot?"

"What? When he as good as told me a year or two back he'd leave me something in his will when he died!"

"No, he was more cautious than to say just that. What he said might mean anything or nothing. He happened to be in spirits that day, and told you that he couldn't do so much for you now as he would by-and-bye, through somebody else. You told me that was pretty much what he said."

"Well, yes; and you know that I took it to mean that the by-and-bye was when he died, and the somebody else was Miss Marion. And then, you know, you've said yourself that if Miss Marion should be left pretty well off, she's that kind-hearted that she'd be likely to do something or other for us. No, it wouldn't do for me to leave the old man, you know yourself it wouldn't."

"I'd rather you put off leaving him as long

as you can. He ain't long for this world ; he's breaking up every day. But, if he won't see your interest better than this, it's your solemn duty to do it for him."

" Do it for him ?"

" Yes, do it for him. The Almighty didn't bring all us together, for you to go and spend the brains he's given you, to fill the pockets of a thankless old varlet who treats you like dirt, and don't care whether you sink or swim as long as you serve his purpose."

" Well, but I don't see what you mean by telling me to ' do it for him. ' "

" Didn't you say the other day that you'd just got another large order in for the United States ?"

" Yes."

" Can you get the goods made in time, and up to the proper finish by this new plan of yours ?"

" If I can get the machinery altered I can.

Or if I can get one or two other machines made, such as I was contriving."

" Could Wheeler do it for you?"

" Yes; I don't doubt but he could."

" Then there's no difficulty there. Get him to do it, and don't bother old Wilmot about it?"

" Well?"

" And turn off the hands you don't want."

" You talk folly, Mary. How could you make sure that all that work didn't make noise enough to reach the master's ears?"

" Pooh, John; don't you be daft. Don't Wheeler know as you've got old Wilmot's authority before to have new tools and things made?"

" Well; but suppose he don't agree to have any more made? I must get his consent, mustn't I?"

" No."

" No?"

“ No ; Wheeler will do the thing at once, won’t he ?”

“ Well ?”

“ He’ll send in his bill to you ?”

“ Yes ; and how am I to pay it ? The master always questions me closely about extras.”

“ You do this. Get the machines made ; pack off about their business the workmen you don’t want ; send out your order abroad, and pay the money into the bank to the old churl’s account, barring what you’ve saved by your invention. D’ye see ?”

“ Yes, I see. But would it be honest ?”

“ Honest ? Why not ? You’ll hand into the bank neither more nor less than what the gaffer looks for, sha’n’t you ?”

“ Yes,” returned John, meditatively.

“ Then he’ll have no fault to find with you there, will he ?”

“ Not if he don’t hear from Wheeler, and

some of the discharged hands, what I'd done."

" Did Wheeler get to him to talk about the former alterations, and did any of the hands you turned off then go grumbling to him?"

" No; they got work at other places the same day."

" To be sure they did; and they'll do the same again, won't they?"

" Mayhap they will."

" Trade's tolerable brisk just now, ain't it?"

" Yes; it's better than I've known it for a year or two past."

" Lor, John, then just look at that. What a fool you'd be not to seize the opportunity to do something for us. Why there's no knowing what you might make out of it."

" I'd better be a fool than a rogue, Mary."

" Rogue? Why should you be a rogue at all?"

“ If I take to my own account what I ought to pay in to the master, what’s that but roguery ?”

“ Then you’d give old Wilmot the benefit of the invention—the graceless old loon, and see your wife and children in rags ?”

Mary had shed no tear hitherto. Now she threatened to play the tragic, and “ pile up the agony,” not without the knowledge that it would be the most likely method she could adopt of leading her husband to submission.

“ No ; I wouldn’t do that, and you know I wouldn’t,” John answered, testily. “ What’s the use of your going on in this way ?”

“ And what’s the use of your being so obstinate where there’s no occasion for it ?”

“ Obstinate ? Is that another word for honest, Mary ?”

“ No, it isn’t. There’s no fear of *your* not being honest, John, and it ain’t likely

your own wife should set you on to do what you hadn't ought to."

John looked down reflectively, but he could not see matters as Mary saw them. He knew that he held only a subordinate position in Mr. Wilmot's manufactory. His master looked to him to be faithful and open and above board in all his dealings with and for him. He knew that in all matters connected with the extension of his master's trade he had that master's interest to consult, and not his own. There was much not down in black and white between himself and his master with regard to which he still felt himself to be a morally responsible agent. John didn't feel comfortable in listening to the doctrines Mary was preaching, and he could not understand how *she* could be comfortable in propounding them. It certainly was a hard case. None could feel it so to be as he did. He did not think that a man in his position, and with so

many to work for, should be allowed to spend his brains to another's profit, for and without personal advantage to himself. But what could he do to alter such a state of things ? That was the question. As for the plan Mary suggested, he *played with it*. He allowed himself to turn it over in his mind, and look at it again and again. He wanted very hard indeed to come to the conviction that he might do all Mary wished him to do without any loss of character in such a transaction, and he made the mistake of supposing that, on mature reflection, he might, to his great advantage, be brought to take the same views Mary took of his duty in this matter. And he was resolving to think about it more at leisure, when Polly, the eldest girl, brought the tea-tray in. Alas ! in resolving to entertain Mary's proposition for a single moment, John Hardiman was a weak man who had made up his mind to parley with a powerful, but unseen enemy. Sin is only the more

likely to overmaster its victim by fondling with him deceitfully ; and it is not always the case that they who “ know the wiles of the devil” are yet strong enough to avoid being “ led captive by him at his will.”

## CHAPTER III.

MR. ABEL GRINDSTONE, OF ICICLE LODGE.

It has been mentioned in the first chapter that Philip Harvey's knowledge of botany, such as it was, was due to the fact that at one time he had studied it with a view to the medical profession. And if that had been to him the most objectionable part of his previous training, a medical practitioner he doubtless would have been. But he was a young gentleman rather hard to please, in-

tent, moreover, on taking life as easily as possible, not moved to perseverance in his medical studies by any particularly strong anxiety to become a benevolent agent in the mitigation of human suffering by means of the noble calling to which they would have led him, and having an additional motive for dilatoriness in his choice of a profession in the fact that he could felicitate himself on the possession of a rich uncle, of whom the reader will hear more in these pages. So it was that he wearied of his hospital rounds, and of his lectures in the dissecting room, and prayed the said uncle that he might be allowed to change his mind.

Mr. Abel Grindstone, of Icicle Lodge, in the village of Clayton-on-the-Hill, was privileged to stand in the avuncular relationship towards Philip Harvey as a consequence of his sister having united herself in marriage to Philip's father. It had been both an ill-assorted, and an unfortunate marriage. Both

parents had been dead some years, having left behind them, to Mr. Grindstone's care, two boys, of whom Philip was the younger. Frank Harvey, the elder, early showed an inclination for agricultural pursuits, which his uncle was the better enabled to gratify on account of his being possessed, at the time of his sister's death, of three large farms. Two of these, of which Icicle Lodge was one, were situated within a comparatively short distance both of Lowchester and of the Poplars. Mr. Grindstone himself lived at the one indicated, and his elder nephew, Frank Harvey, had been a year or two in charge, on his uncle's behalf, of another farm at Littledale; and, being a man of fixed and steady habits, and one who had long known his own mind on points most conducive to his welfare and success in life, he gave every promise of a prosperous career.

At the time when our story opens, the two brothers were together, on the Littledale

Farm. Philip was yet a tyro in the science of farming, and indeed, if the truth must be told, gave little more promise of success in the avocation he had last chosen, than in the one he had abandoned. He was afflicted with an instability of purpose, an unsettled state of mind, a disposition to dream away his time, that would have been productive for him of the most serious consequences had it not been for his expectations from his uncle. There were four other farms within a very easy distance of the one on which the brothers were stationed, and as two of them were in the hands of occupiers of prosperous circumstances and neighbourly dispositions, the hamlet of Littledale was not quite the dullest place in all the world.

There was an unusually early harvest this year, and the last load had been carried in on Frank Harvey's farm. The labourers and their families were in high glee, the crops had been quite up to the average supply, the

weather was just now all that could be desired. Frank was in the midst of the excitement, and in high good humour with his men. He was a hearty, energetic, broad-shouldered, iron-nerved Saxon; not the most handsome of men, to judge by his face, but no very great loser on that account. He stood a field or two off the homestead, saluting, and saluted by the men, as, with laughing eyes and noisy mouths, they brought in the last well-laden waggon, preparatory to the harvest supper. As the waggon passed him he touched one of its conductors on the shoulder, and signalled him away from the others.

The labourer was a clean visaged man, spare in figure, and his age might be about fifty. He would have been tall but for the common agricultural stoop. A pallid, anxious look shot across his face as he drew near the young farmer. The rest presently were out of hearing.

“Thank you, Turner, for your help to-day.”

“Not a bit, sir; not a bit. You see we’ve cleared all in, and Sam was as willin’ as me to give you a helpin’ hand. If I worked till my heart stopped for you I couldn’t do too much.”

“Oh! never mind that; but I want to speak to you about this arrear of rent. My uncle will be here this afternoon. I shall be looking out for him in an hour or so, and he’s savage that the payment hasn’t been made, and I’ve reason besides this to know that he means to—to—”

“There, don’t say another word, Mr. Frank. I knows what you mean. He ain’t like you, sir. His’n ’d be a happier death-bed if he was. But what be I to do? I *can’t* pay up the arrear, sir. I raally can’t. Yer know my heart’s good to do it. It’s wearing the heart out o’ me to be in an obligation to *him*.

But just let him look again at my caase. He knows the best part o' the kine have died i' the pleague, an' that I was forced to sell last year's wheat at a loss, and that all last year's hay was spiled, every blessed bit of it, an' that I had a long doctor's bill and funeral expenses to pay for poor Jeane, an' that there's lots of the childer yet as is too young to arn their livins ; an' what be I to do, sir ? The Lord's laid that heap o' troubles on me that it well nigh threatens to crush me ; it does, indeed."

" You know how sorry I am for you, and you know what I think about your troubles ; but we must be practical as well as sentimental in this world of ours. My uncle, I fear—to be very plain with you—will make you quit the farm."

At these words Turner pressed his lips together, and his face darkened.

" He can do what he likes, I s'pose, sir ; and let him do it. It'll come home, til him,

that it will. Blessed if I'd be in his shoes for all his gold ; no, dang it, that I wouldn't."

"That's neither here nor there, Turner. We men have no right to pull each other over the coals as we do too often. 'A still tongue shows a wise head' when we're angry with each other, don't it ?"

"But how the — ; beggin' your pardon, sir, how be I to put up wi' all this ? Is it my fault ?"

"No."

"Then is it natural, or unnatural, that a poor man, with a big family, whose cattle have died, pigs an' kine, of pleague ; whose wheat—"

"Never mind that, Turner," returned Mr. Harvey, impatiently. "You have to make your case good to my uncle, not to me."

"No, that's my luck. What's the good o' goin' to church ? What's the good o' sayin' prayers ? What's the good—"

"Turner !"

“ Well, sir. Let Muster Grindstone be in my place, and tell me how he’d like it.”

“ Pooh, man, be sensible; he isn’t in your place. You don’t want to lose the farm, of course?”

“ No, sir, that I don’t; but what be I to do?”

Mr. Frank Harvey looked down reflectively.

“ If my uncle can see his way to having the money by Christmas—half down, and half to stand over till then—he may consent to wait; but I know he wants me to have the farm.”

“ Aye, an’ he’d be glad of any excuse to turn me out of it, I reckon. Well, sir, it’s a matter of sixty-seven pound, this debt o’ mine to him altogether, an’ blessed if I know how to pay it. I can sell the wheat an’ the wuts for a’most nothin’, and send off to market a cart horse an’ a cow, and then maybe I can do summat towards clearin’ the rent,

but you see, sir, that isn't all; there's Knowles, the grocer, an'—”

“Never mind, you've told me all this before. Can you give me any money for my uncle to-day?”

The labourer looked as a man would be likely to look who might be about to be squeezed in a vice.

“I raaly can't, sir; I can't, indeed. It's o' no use on him tryin' to draw blood out o' a stooan. If I've a sovereign i' the house I know it's as much as I have, an' what's the good o' givin' him that?”

“H'm; and you can't get a friend to help you out?”

“A friend! Lord bless you, sir! A friend! Where be I to find him?” And tears stood in the poor man's eyes as he spoke.

And with that they turned together, and walked towards the house.

Poor Amos Turner's farm was the smallest

of the five near Littledale, and, in one sense, it had an evil reputation. Such acres as there were upon it were in good cultivation, and the land was of good quality, but no tenant seemed to prosper on it. It had passed into the hands of Abel Grindstone some years before this conversation took place, as a consequence of the former owner having borrowed of him money which he could not repay. This poor man quitted the country, and died of disappointment at the gold diggings. Turner's predecessor had been compelled to give it up, and lapse into the condition of a hind again, and now the same fate threatened Amos, who had spent upon it all his hard-earned savings, and had been reduced to great distress, despite his perseverance and industry, by a succession of calamities and severe losses, which, financially speaking, so often break the backs of the poorer tenant-farmers, who have little capital,

behind which to shelter themselves, from the storms of the evil day.

Hardly had Amos reached his own kitchen when the man he most dreaded, Mr. Abel Grindstone, was seen by him to emerge, on his old white horse, from under the covert of two rows of trees that overshadowed the road into Littledale near his garden foot. The old man turned a long, angry look at the house, as he rode past it.

He was a little man, on whose square-built head, flat along the top, rested the snows of more than seventy winters. He had a blue, pinched expression of countenance; his Roman nose did its best to meet, half-way, his up-turned, prominent chin; and, from loss of teeth, his cheeks and lips had fallen in. His spare figure was habited in a suit of rusty black, the fashion whereof was venerable to contemplate, and the fit such as would have thrown any pretentious tailor into an agony. An old, high-crowned, dirty

white hat, the date of whose creation I will not attempt to guess at, was so placed on his head as *not* to improve the contour of face beneath.

What a wonderful appendage to a human head is the hat! wonderful in its power of imparting a diversity of expression to the countenance of the wearer, as the mode in which you place it on the head varies. Had you met Mr. Abel Grindstone, with his hat far back from his face, you would have felt inclined to take him off his horse, and shut him up in an asylum as an idiot. Had you encountered him with the said capitular covering forced forward over his brow you would have thought him more or less drunk. Had he suddenly appeared within the focus of vision wearing his hat on the one side or the other of his head you would have seen in him the personification of a silly old beau. Abel wore his hat in neither of these ways. It towered perpendicularly up from his head,

and added intensity to the cunning expression of the small grey eyes from the close proximity to them of its lower rim.

Frank Harvey met and saluted his uncle at the entrance gate of the farm, and the old gentleman exploded into business before he left his saddle.

“Frank, you haven’t cleared out those fields, I see.”

“Not cleared them out, sir?”

“No; there’s enough wheat left in that six-acre piece yonder to make a good weighty stack or two.”

“But the gleaners?”

“Gleaners! Stuff and nonsense! The men get good wages, and corn’s down at ruination-price for the farmers. Send two or three men in, and make a clearance of the land to-morrow.”

Frank Harvey looked searchingly for a moment into his uncle’s face, and, as he did so, the blood rushed into his cheeks, and

there was a tremor about the lips. He dared not trust himself to speak just then. But, for a moment, he wondered whether it would shame the old man to draw out of his pocket his own comparatively ill-filled purse, and place in his hands a piece of gold, that the women and children might glean their fill, and never hear that a privilege, centuries old, had been denied them by any relative of his. He had, however, another request to proffer, and he did this, perhaps, in a tone of voice that slightly betrayed the rising disgust he had felt on account of his uncle's strange attitude towards the poor expectant gleaners.

“I was about—indeed I had promised—to make up a small sheaf of corn for our Harvest Thanksgiving Service.”

“Thanksgiving! Why the harvest isn’t such a grand one as to call for that, is it? Where do you hold the service?”

“In Cliffe Church.”

“Cliffe? No. What have I to do with

Cliffe ? Let them get their small sheaves of corn from their own people.”

“ The Cliffe people have given to the utmost of their power, but the church decorations are on an extensive scale this year, and the flour from the sheaves given to the church is to be devoted to a particular purpose. There has, you are aware, sir, been great distress among the labourers there of late.”

“ Well, what of that ? What have I to do with that ? I suppose it isn’t *my* fault, is it ?”

“ But one is glad to be a means of—of feeding the hungry, uncle.”

“ Hungry ! Gad, we may soon be hungry ourselves, if corn is to keep at such a price.”

Frank Harvey opened his eyes wide at this remark. Could his uncle have forgotten the highly favourable position in which he stood at his banker’s ? For years he had been a prosperous man. For years he had been in the habit of making bargains, very much to

his own advantage, so as to have increased his property greatly. It had been whispered that he was likely to leave something like two hundred thousand pounds behind him—the rider of that old, worn-out, white horse, the wearer of that old, ill-fitting suit. Could it, then, be possible that such a man as that should grumble about a few stalks of corn left to the gleaners, and refuse to contribute even his mite towards a service of thanksgiving, and deny his bread to the hungry, and even hint that, one day, he might become a-hungered himself!

Mr. Grindstone then changed the subject of conversation after having grudgingly assented that the gleaners should not be denied their expected pleasure, and that a small sheaf of corn should, under private protest from himself, be sent to the Rector of Cliffe for his harvest thanksgiving service.

“Has Amos Turner said anything about his rent?”

“ Yes. He has been speaking about it to-day. Poor fellow, his losses have been frightfully heavy.”

“ That’s his look out. I didn’t bring misfortune on his head, I suppose? What did he propose to do? I shall put a bailiff in possession to-morrow, if something is not done at once.”

“ This very day, sir?”

“ This very day? Of course; but what is he going to do?”

“ I called him to me just before you came. He has been giving us a helping hand!”

“ Humph! Very generous! Well?”

“ And I suggested that if he could give you part of the money, and promise the rest by Christmas, you would institute no proceedings in the matter. I asked if he could find a friend to help him out of his trouble.

“ Friend, to lend him forty pounds on such security as he can offer! Mind, I won’t take a shilling less—no, not a penny less. If he

*can* find such a friend, it will only show the truth of the old adage—‘A fool and his money are soon parted.’”

“He will, nevertheless, succeed, I believe, sir.”

Frank Harvey’s eyes flashed indignant fire as he spoke.

“All the better for both him and me. He will bring the money to you, of course? Send me word by to-night’s post that he has paid it, or I shall do as I have said.”

And Abel Grindstone was not the man to break his word, as Frank Harvey well knew. He staid not that evening to preside at the harvest supper, and say a kindly word of sympathy to his men, but, as he rode away once more under the avenue, he turned and shouted back—

“Mind that fellow pays you this night, Frank; or let me know.”

## CHAPTER IV.

MR. MAXIMILIAN BADGER.

FEW persons will feel disposed to combat the truth of the assertion that the inhabitants of Lowchester could have made no great progress in the world without lawyers. They were thirty thousand in number. They were essentially and indisputably human in all their ways, every man among them believing it to be his imperative duty to look after his own interests first, in preference to those of

his neighbour. And there was nothing in the air about Lowchester to render men constitutionally sluggish, in the assertion of their real or conceived rights, or evangelically anxious to merge them altogether, in an absorbing regard for the welfare of their neighbours. Such being the case, it will at once be conceded that the aforesaid town would have been, socially speaking, no very nice place to live in, if there had been no lawyers in it to keep all things straight there.

But every one knows that—to divide them broadly—lawyers are of two kinds. There are high-minded practitioners, strong in their old and well-established connection with the families of importance around them—men who would sternly and stubbornly refuse to have the halo about their social status be-dimmed by any sacrifice of honour and principle to mercenary considerations; and there are lawyers of the *pettifogging* type, with whom fees are everything, and justice, and power to

remunerate their services, convertible articles. Lawyers who have no consciences at all, who consent to have dust thrown in their own eyes, and eat their hard-earned bread by means of throwing it into the eyes of other people. Lawyers with whom justice is a saleable commodity, and capable of being placed by them at the disposal of the highest bidder, and in whose eyes the practice of forbearance and mercy, whether towards the deserving, or the undeserving, is a romantic or impossible thing, taught in the Gospels, but not applicable to the concerns of every day life.

Mr. Abel Grindstone's lawyer was a man of this latter type. Mr. Grindstone's shrine was the Bank in which his idol was placed; his lawyer and his banker were co-priests in the temple in which he worshipped. Occasionally, in order to keep up his credit among respectable people, he was corporeally present in his parish church, but, as was the case with Naaman, the Syrian Captain in the house of

his master's God, Rimmon, he was not mentally or spiritually there. He went to church, simply out of deference to public opinion. The same motive led him to fill his seat in church, even on days when a money contribution was looked for from him, for could he not displace rather noisily the coin existing in the alms bag, when he put his own thumb and forefinger into it, and could he not, by feigning mistake, drop a heavy copper coin on the thick carpet of his pew, and have it taken by the churchwarden, too busy to look at the coin as he picked it up and hurried on, for a crown-piece? In the one case, when acted upon by a special regard for his idol, he could simply make a noise *like giving*, and, in the other case, he could *really give*, and have his offering mistaken for one of sixty-fold value. And even if this latter cheat should be discovered, could he not instantly assume a bothered look, and insist upon it that he had certainly meant to contribute the more impos-

ing coin, and had been the victim of inadvertence in the matter? In the one shrine, Mr. Grindstone was a wakeful, clear-headed, well-remembering worshipper; in the other only he was, or pretended to be, sleepy, confused, and forgetful.

Mr. Maximilian Badger believed in Mr. Grindstone's money, and had provided himself with a peculiar pair of spectacles whereby his vision might be duly narrowed down to his client's views of things, and with a peculiar steel corslet worn over the heart, which rendered that organ impervious to any darts of impertinent censure that might be aimed at it by the enemies among whom he moved. Mr. Badger, too, kept by him other spectacles of various powers to magnify or diminish, to render clear, or indistinct, the facts which his legal acumen, such as it was, was bought to attend to. He had no tin boxes in his office filled with the papers of Sir Timothy Rich, the Earl of Dash, the Duke of Blank, or other

social notabilities, but he possessed this stock of spectacles instead. And with every client he was, more or less, complaisant and at his ease, because, from the first moment in which that client entered his office, he had nothing to do but reach down and fit upon his own legal eyes, the pair of spectacles which his interview with that particular client would require, and replace them on their shelf when he left.

Mr. Badger's business required him to retain constantly the services of a copying clerk, whom he paid according to the lowest scale of remuneration for which he could hope to secure that unhappy individual's services. And in regard to the state of his clerk's worldly circumstances Mr. Badger was not troubled by sleepless nights. He had taken care in the first instance to select a needy man for his assistant, before whose eyes he had kept suspended in dim perspective the possibility that he might have his articles from

him at some indefinite period—date cautiously withheld. Mr. Badger knew what other lawyers thought about his practice. He knew that a clerk from his office would be little likely to have his professional services engaged elsewhere, and on that account was disposed to indifference, as to the said clerk's possibly leaving him. He had lived in the same bad odour with his employer for years, till the sense of his hopeless position with regard to any prospect of bettering his condition in life had drained all manly spirit out of him, and had left him only a miserable drudge, conscious that his capability of bread-winning was, for the most part, narrowed down to one office, and so far trusting Mr. Badger as to believe that he would one day give him his articles and a partnership to compensate him for past neglect. But Christmas after Christmas came, and passed away, and still Mr. Binks was to be seen in Mr. Badger's office, a little man of stooping figure, iron-grey hair,

and lank countenance, the very nine-pin of a hard lot, as you could have seen had you looked at him with half an eye, or listened to his thin, weak voice. Yet the street door bore on it only the name and designation, “Mr. Maximilian Badger, Solicitor,” and as the paint at this time was scarcely dry by means of which the said inscription had been renewed, the poor spiritless clerk felt that the prospect of beholding the names “Badger and Binks” thereon was still distant and dim as it had ever been.

Three days had passed since the interview between old Grindstone and his nephew, related in the last chapter, and early in the day Mr. Binks was seated at his desk, with low pulse and weary look, when Mr. Badger entered. He, too, was a little man, but his appearance, in comparison with that of his clerk, was as that of a plump partridge side by side with a lean, cadaverous crow. Mr. Badger had returned only that morning from

a week's holiday by the sea-side. His bright sharp eyes and generally jovial appearance spoke silently of many holidays, and of supplies of beef steaks and stout repeated *ad libitum*. Mr. Binks, to do him justice, was honest and trustworthy, and was the more invaluable to his employer because his spirits were for the most part always at too low an ebb to allow him to think about holidays. The thin, pale man tumbled off his tall stool with an air of melancholy welcome as the stout rosy man entered and addressed him.

“ Well, Binks ; here we are again. We shall have to buckle to this week. Anybody been ?”

“ Yes, sir ; Mr. Grindstone has been I think four times about that case of Amos Turner’s.”

“ Four times ! But you’ve served the writ, of course ?”

Mr. Badger could scarcely have uttered his question more cheerfully if he had demanded whether his clerk had served the numerous

children at Amos Turner's with sweetmeats all round, and whether they had liked them?"

"Well, no, sir, I haven't. There's a difficulty arisen to prevent me from doing it."

"Difficulty! What d'ye mean! Egad! it's no wonder the old gentleman's been so often. I wish I'd been at home. What's prevented it?"

"Mr. Frank's been too, sir."

"Whew! that's it, is it? I see it, of course. Did the two stumble on each other?"

"They were within a toucher of it yesterday. The old man had but just turned round the corner of the street when up came his nephew from another direction."

"No! That's fine," commented Mr. Badger, rubbing his hands. Well, what did Mr. Frank want?"

"To stop the service of the writ."

"And the old gentleman?"

"He of course wanted to push it on."

“Of course he would ; and you told him—”

“That it should certainly be seen to, but that you were from home, and my own hands full just then, so that it must be put off till your return.”

“Said nothing to him then about Frank’s coming ?”

Mr. Binks opened his eyes in amazement. Could it be possible that he had worked all those years along the Badgerian grooves and be supposed capable by his master of making such a slip as that ?”

“I see, Binks ; all right. Then there’s been no concussion ? He ! he ! he ! Well, both are coming again, of course. How about the times of their calling ?”

“The old gentleman’s comin’ at ten, sir. He wanted to see you early because he has to go up to town, and Mr. Frank’s comin’ at twelve.”

“Capital ! Old Grindstone will be fast

asleep by that time in his third-class carriage, or reading a paper, if anyone will buy him one, eh? Is the writ prepared?"

"All right, sir; quite ready," and here Mr. Binks produced that disagreeable-looking document from between the leaves of a ponderous ledger, and placed it in his employer's hands, who glanced at it with entire and unalloyed satisfaction.

"Yes; this is well. There need be no delay, if we can't come to terms."

"You and Mr. Frank, sir, you mean?"

"Of course I do. I can't make out what that young man's driving at. Coming in for a splendid fortune, none can tell how soon, and fooling it all away beforehand in this way; and for other people's benefit, too. Egad, Binks, an awkward idea's just struck me. D'ye think he's mad?"

"No, sir," remarked Binks, quite enthusiastically for him; "no more mad than I am. But it's the way of the world to think

people mad when they put themselves overmuch about, and do themselves harm for the good of their neighbours ; and I think, sir, that Mr. Frank, in his quiet way, is above the world in many things.”

Mr. Badger was much too sharp a man not to perceive that in what his long-suffering clerk had been saying, in the middle of his last little speech, he had intended to convey some slight hint of his own sense of grievance, about the single name newly painted again on the outside of the door ; but Maximilian had occasionally received harder moral knocks from his clerk, and had not been very long in recovering from the shock of them.

“ As to Mr. Frank being above the world, Binks, of course we both know he is in the best of all senses. He hasn’t to toil and moil for his bread as you and I have. It’s all ready to his hand, buttered for himself and his heirs.”

“ Yes, but I didn’t mean that, sir,” returned

the clerk, with a look of annoyance. "I meant—"

Mr. Badger knew what Mr. Binks meant, but here their conversation was suddenly interrupted by the sound of someone coming up the stairs. Both gentlemen took it as a signal—the one to retire into his own private sanctum, the other to resume his humbler work at the clerk's desk again.

The visitor was Mr. Abel Grindstone, true to his appointment. As he reached the top of the stairs he caught sight of his lawyer's broad back just entering his office, and hurried after him with an agility not common in men of his age.

"Well, how are you, Badger? So at last I've caught you. Been to the sea-side again, eh? You're always going there."

"One gets rusty, sir, with so much close office work; and the old machine gets out of order, and wants oiling. One loses one's appetite and relish for things, and—oh! I

couldn't do without the sea, Mr. Grindstone ; couldn't, indeed. Nothing sets me up like a dip in the sea."

" *Old* machine you call it, do you ? Wait till you are as old as I am. And as for its getting out of order, the best oil that I know for it is castor oil ; you can get two penn'orth of it at the druggist's as I do ; and don't give your stomach so much work to do. That's the secret of health—lower diet and longer walks. Lord bless you, I couldn't bear fooling away my money at the sea, and neglecting my clients' interests, as you do."

Mr. Abel Grindstone, as it will be seen, believed in plain speaking sometimes. And he indulged in it the more with Mr. Badger as he knew that gentleman would as little think of resenting it in him as of attempting to test practically the wonderful machines of the Aeronautical Society. On this occasion Mr. Badger simply grunted an assent, looked thoughtful for a minute, and changed the subject.

“ Well, sir, what can I do for you to-day ? Geoffrey Wilmot’s signed that mortgage deed. Binks had a run over to see him the other day, and said how awfully ill he looked. Can’t live long, I should think ?”

“ Not he ; yet he’s ten years younger than I am or more. Badger !”

Mr. Grindstone spoke that nomenclature with a knowing bend of his head and bated breath.

“ Sir ?”

“ That’s a good thing well done.”

“ Glad to hear you say so ; but why, particularly ?”

“ Well, from what I’ve heard, there’ll be a smash there soon. Mark my words ; old Wilmot stays too much at home, mooning under that verandah. He thinks that man Hardiman’s a very quiet, trustworthy fellow. Quiet he may be—so are volcanoes sometimes ; but—”

“ You don’t think him trustworthy ?”

“ Not a bit of it. I should think the man a great fool if he were, with such temptations in his way.”

“ Great fool ! my dear sir !”

“ Pooh ! Now, Badger, look here. I may want you to stir into that matter again for me one of these days. That’s a pie I’ve long wished to have a finger in, I do assure you.”

“ The business wants capital, no doubt, to carry it on.”

“ Very well ; don’t you and I know who can find the capital ?”

“ Till I know more about the trade, its requirements, and its remunerative capacity, I think I should not be consulting your interests if I were to advise—”

“ I don’t want your advice.”

“ Oh !”

“ All I wanted to do was to prepare you for giving me advice as to that matter when it is wanted. There’s a deuced clever head at work in that business, Badger, and the

whole affair's simply tumbling to pieces because the owner of that clever head is underpaid."

" You mean Hardiman ?"

" I do."

" But have you heard anything ?"

" Now, Badger, don't I keep my ears open ? Don't I make it my business to get into conversation with high and low where there's a chance of a bargain being driven ? I know that all isn't right there. That fool Wilmot never goes near ; p'raps he can't, but that's neither here nor there. What I know is this, that one of their workmen, a sharp fellow whom Hardiman has lately turned off, and who has a brother in a better position than himself in some house of business in America, has his eyes on this Hardiman—*watches* him ; you know what I mean. I don't say there's anything up yet exactly. No, no ; at present the volcano's quiet, but there'll be an explosion soon. *Palaver* now, you know ; don't

you see ? Old Wilmot believes in Hardiman's smooth tongue, but the *lava* afterwards, eh ?"

" Well ?"

" Hardiman's looking up considerably of late. I've heard of his having wine in his house. He's had it painted and done throughout. His wife and children turn out in smart clothes. There's some silver been bought. They've been looking at a larger house. D'ye see ?"

" Yes. Has Wilmot been generous lately ?"

" Generous !"

Mr. Grindstone repeated the word in a tone of unspeakable scorn.

" Have you served that writ ?"

" My dear, sir, I'd been in only an hour or two when you called ; but it shall be seen to."

" At once, Badger. You've made me break my word. I can't stop. I've only ten minutes to catch my train. Don't forget."

A moment afterwards Mr. Grindstone was in the street, hurrying on to take his third-

class ticket for Liverpool, at the Lowchester Station, as if his life depended upon it.

Then Mr. Badger received a stream of clients, one after another. He shewed his expertness that morning in the rapid changes of the aforesaid legal spectacles, and of the tones with which he received his various clients. Some he fawned upon—some he snubbed. A poor tradesman, with a large family dependent on him, who came in without the money Badger had been looking for from him, and asked for a little merciful delay, he scowled at, and threatened in loud tones ; the echoes of which fell clearly into Mr. Frank Harvey's ears as he next reached the top of the staircase, and proceeded into the legal sanctum.

“ Badger, I wish your place was not so much like a lion's den to some poor folk. Doesn't it make you miserable now and then to think what misery you cause to others ?”

“ H’m, no, Mr. Frank. On the whole I find life not uncomfortable. I’ve many things to be thankful for.”

“ Never have your sleep disturbed at night by visions of infuriated debtors, starving families, and the like ?”

“ No, sir ; and it wouldn’t be right if it were so. Would it now ?”

“ Not exactly ; no, we must have lawyers. But, without a doubt, they’re the means of inflicting a vast amount of misery.”

Mr. Badger’s face grew dark.

“ I can’t agree with you, Mr. Frank,” he said, “ I think it is unfair to sit so heavily on us poor limbs of the law as you do. In our capacity as go-betweens, we are undoubtedly often called upon to do what gives us pain, you know, but then, of course, society requires our help, and we don’t act without cause or reason on our side.”

“ Except when one member of society isn’t

quite Christian towards another member of society, and you limbs of the law help the stronger against the weaker—Eh, Badger?"

" I can't quite catch your meaning, sir. I suppose you met that wretched man, Higgins, on the stairs as you came up, and you think he's the weak man, and that I'm helping a strong man to crush him. Nothing of the kind. The man has been a drunkard, and is behind-hand in his payments, and I interfere legally to—"

" Quite so. Right of course, Badger. The man doesn't bear a good character?"

" Character? I know very little of him, and that little shows me what he is."

" H'm; well, have you anything to say against poor Amos?"

" Amos Turner? Not a word. He's an honest, hard-working fellow enough."

" And yet you're going to issue a writ against him. I left the man just now shivering in his shoes, pale and haggard as that

parchment ; and all because he's expecting a visitation through your means.”

“ Precisely. But, in issuing that writ, I am a passive instrument in the hands of your uncle. Amos owes him money, and you and I know well your uncle is not one to let alone, for long at a time, any one who stands in the relationship of a debtor towards him. Now, certainly, if it were my case—that is, I mean, if I were left to act as I like, with regard to Amos Turner, and if I were as rich as your uncle, you know—”

“ Well, well ; let that be. Never speak ill of the absent. But I want you to help me to set that matter straight. I can’t do it without your help.”

“ More money, Mr. Frank ?”

“ Yes, yes ; you know my allowance won’t let me do much for the poor fellow. You’ll lend me what he wants, won’t you ?”

“ H’m ! yes, I will. But may I ask, for your own sake, of course, does Amos give

you any security for the repayment of this money? Don't you see, Mr. Frank, these fits of generosity on your part—”

“ Pooh! Badger. Depend upon it I take care of myself. I'm not such a gone coon as that. You are not afraid of my security for the loan I want?”

“ Afraid, no; but I can't make out what you think money was made for, that you—waste it like this.”

“ Waste it?” asked Frank Harvey, as the hot blood mounted to his cheeks. But he quickly recovered the composure that was habitual with him. “ Well, you know my views about the money question, Badger, and there's no need to repeat them here. You'll let me have enough to stop that writ from being served on a worthy, honest man?”

“ On the usual terms, of course, Mr. Frank?”

“ On the usual terms. And you'll get the

best interest for your money, and know at the same time that you've had a hand in taking off a great burden."

"H'm! well, yes, it's pleasant to look at the matter in that light, certainly," said Mr. Badger, rubbing his hands for a moment as though a sudden chill had seized them. "Ten per cent. Mr. Frank; you won't mind that. I can't do it for less, you know, sir."

"Your own terms, of course. Then now hand to me that writ, and a receipt in full for my uncle's claim against Turner. That'll be the same thing to me as the money, you know."

Presently afterwards Mr. Frank received both these documents. He placed the one in his pocket-book, and threw the other into the fire, and greedily watched it till it was consumed to ashes. Then he took his leave, and if Mr. Badger's thoughts, as he looked earnestly, though somewhat cynically after his

retreating figure, had been expressed in language, the purport of them might have run thus—

“ Come as often as you like. Ten per cent., and as safe as the Bank of England. But I can’t make you out. Your notions of things and mine don’t square. Such a splendid fortune as you’ll have in a year or two at most, and yet throw your sovereigns away as if they were shirt-buttons, and your five-pound notes like bits of waste paper. But have your fling. It’ll be all the better for me. Ten per cent. isn’t to be had every day.”

## CHAPTER V.

IN THE DINING-ROOM AT WIMPERLEY GRANGE.

“BUT, Marion, you really *must* come; you must indeed. I intend to take no denial. Such a snug, quiet dinner-party, my dear; not a stranger amongst them, and all so fond of you. Do come along, hinny; the ponies, little fidgety wretches, won’t wait much longer.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Cameron, I can’t really leave papa; you see how ill he looks.”

“ Not worse, child, than he has been looking for months. And then your Aunt Edith is with him now. Come, Miss Wilmot, let me press you into the service. Help me to turn Marion out. Do *you* see any harm in her going with Priscy and me ?”

This dialogue took place in the entrance hall of the Poplars. Mrs. Cameron was the wife of a country gentleman and a magistrate, whose seat lay about three miles away from the Poplars, on the Lowchester road. She was one of Marion Wilmot’s warmest friends, a pretty little woman, who delighted to have every one about her happy; merry, for the most part, in her moods, racketty in her conversational powers, warm-hearted and affectionate, but apt to take offence quickly. An exceedingly neat little phaeton stood in front of the hall door during the colloquy of the ladies within, drawn by two brown ponies, whose round, shining backs, arched necks, and impatient pawings of the ground, gave

sufficient evidence of their high breed and good condition.

Aunt Edith was one of the old maids whom society delights to honour. Care had not trodden on her corns sufficiently to destroy the benevolence of her disposition, or the elasticity of her temperament. She struggled still to look on the bright side of all things. A tender sister and an experienced nurse, she was the very one Geoffry Wilmot most needed beneath his roof, and within the last week or ten days she had come to devote herself to her brother in his lingering sickness, and every one felt he could not be in better hands.

“ Oh! go, Marion, by all means. I see you want to go, child. Your father would rather have me with him than anyone else, I know; and we shall have the home quieter without you.”

“ Aunt Edith !”

“ Quite right, Miss Wilmot. Marion, you

*must* come. Ten minutes, to tie your bonnet on. You know we may not meet a soul till we reach home, and I always drive my little wretches so furiously, that if there are any young men about, they will be run over, if they choose to stand still looking at you."

Marion paused for a moment, half serious, half smiling. Then inclination prevailed, and she rushed upstairs to her room, and in twenty minutes descended, fully equipped, and with a maid behind, bearing sundry dresses, and adornments, wherein to make her appearance in the evening. And a pleasant, chatty evening, upon the whole, it proved to be. Into the skeleton cupboard of the Camerons the reader has not yet looked, nor, if he had been present beneath their hospitable roof on the occasion referred to, would he have dreamed that so disagreeable a fact was to be met with on the domain. The hostess was radiant and charming, the host in the kindest mood. It must have been the fault

of the guests if the evening had not passed happily away.

There are dinner-parties—we know them well—where the prevailing characteristics are stateliness and frigidity. A number of unhappy individuals are gathered together thereat, not to eat, drink, and be merry, after the recognised Christian fashion of the country, but to be overawed, and temporarily stultified, by the state observed, and the magnificence massed around them. On such occasions there is “a nipping and an eager air” for the guests, from the first appearance of the hostess in her drawing-room to the last pressure of her hand in taking leave. If there be anything approaching to hospitable warmth, it comes then—at the extreme end of the proceedings. There is no “feast of reason” or “flow of soul” in such gatherings. In everything the artificial prevails over the natural. Host, hostess, guests eat artificially and talk artificially. You are

there *not* to have your hearts warmed and cheered, *not* to know that you are introduced and welcomed into a guild of Christian good fellows, *not* to learn and to teach after an honest, natural fashion, by the free, unfettered interchange of ideas in brisk conversation, but to be victimised on the altar of fashion, till within an hour of midnight. You are required to submit to the torture caused by songs, of which you hear not a single word; and by fugues, whose music has no soul in it, and whose length threatens to be interminable. Like “the wounded snake,” that evening “drags its slow length along,” and you retire to bed at night with the lie upon your conscience which you uttered in your parting assurance to the hostess, that you had enjoyed yourself excessively, when you had consciously been bored to the utmost verge of human endurance.

Such was *not* the characteristic of the

evening gatherings under the roof of Wimperley Grange.

The Camerons' parties could seldom, if ever, be called large. There was no possibility of any guest, even if he had felt disposed to be bashful, retreating, unobserved by host or hostess, into some secret corner of the reception-rooms. The heads of that house were genial without being fussy. Dinner was served with a due regard to the inexorable demands of society. There was no lack of the massive, or of the elegant, thereat. But a home-feeling permeated the hearts and minds of the assembled guests, that left them no time to examine trivial and unimportant accessories.

When Marion, with Mrs. Cameron and her eldest daughter Priscilla, entered the drawing-room that evening, the two first to exchange mutual greetings with them were Frank and Philip Harvey. Mr. Abel Grind-

stone was absent. He neither accepted nor extended hospitality. In the room with the two nephews were Mr. Wright, the family lawyer, and Mrs. Wright, Dr. Buchanan, the family surgeon, and Mrs. Buchanan, Messrs. Pitman and Merriman, neighbouring curates, and other notabilities whose homes were within an easy drive of the Grange.

“Here he is, Marion, here he is,” said merry little Mrs. Cameron, as Philip Harvey approached them. “For me, I am the most unpunctual creature possible, but one never has any occasion to find fault with you for being late, Mr. Philip, especially when our friend Miss Wilmot condescends to be of the party.”

Marion’s bright blush must have been observed by everyone near to her. Philip Harvey merely bowed and smiled, and then turned away to chat with Priscilla.

Just in the first pause of the conversation, immediately following the retirement of the

ladies, while the decanters were again in circulation, Dr. Buchanan was toying abstractedly with his dessert knife and plate.

“Cameron,” he said at last, “there’s a sort of brotherly feeling, I take it, among us fellows, who are so often to be found under your roof-tree, isn’t there?”

“Brotherly feeling? Yes, I hope so, but it may be interrupted if you let the wine stand by you so long. Why do you ask?”

“Are we all to be trusted to keep a secret?”

“Secret? Is it a plot you’re hatching against Her Majesty’s Government, in which you want us all to be sworn accomplices?” asked the host.

“And you a magistrate! That’s a rich idea, certainly; no, but I particularly want to mention something, which I hope the gentlemen present will be good enough to regard in the light of a confidential communication.”

Everyone round the table gave his promise to keep to himself the matter of which the doctor wished to speak.

“ Well, it’s a simple matter enough, but rather a delicate one. Poor Nichols, of St. Mark’s, sent for me late last night.”

“ St. Mark’s, Lowchester ?” asked the host.

“ Yes, the Perpetual Curate of St. Mark’s. You know him, Cameron ?”

“ Only by name. I’ve heard him preach, but I don’t know him, you know. Is he ill ?”

“ Very ill, I fear ; and it isn’t medicine that’ll cure him.”

“ H’m, sorry to hear that,” said the host. “ Hasn’t he a family ?”

“ About a dozen children,” interposed Mr. Wright.

“ Not quite so many,” remarked Mr. Pittman. “ Ten, I think, living. One, I know, is dead. I took the funeral myself.”

“ He ought to have private means, then ?” remarked the family lawyer, enquiringly.

“That’s just what I wish he had, poor fellow,” returned the doctor.

“Anyhow, doctor, he’s a richer man than I am. Benson gives me less than half what Nichols has. I’m ‘passing rich on fifty pounds a-year,’ ” interposed Mr. Merriman, pathetically.

“Yes, but you’ve married a rich wife, Merriman, and are altogether independent of the Church,” remarked Pitman. “I wish I had that happiness.”

“Marry a rich wife, too, then,” suggested his clerical brother. “But we’re interrupting Buchanan. Go a-head, doctor.”

“Well, I don’t know that I’ve much to say, except that poor Nichols’ case troubles me much. It’s a very hard one.”

“Ah!” remarked the host, “I am sure it *would* trouble you. You were always a kind-hearted one, doctor. But why did the man marry?”

“Cameron! Why did *you* marry?”

“ Hurrah, doctor, well hit. Press him hard,” urged Mr. Merriman, gleefully.

The host looked at first a little foolish, but presently recovered himself.

“ I married because I fell in love, of course. But then, you see, I could afford myself that luxury, and, besides, Mrs. Cameron, when I married her, was better off than I imagine Mrs. Nichols was.”

“ Yes ; she was a governess. But you see Nichols fell in love with her, Cameron.”

“ Then he ought to have thought twice before he did it.”

“ For aught we know, he may have thought fifty times about it, and yet have resolved upon perpetrating matrimony.”

“ H’m ; and don’t you think he now and then wishes he hadn’t perpetrated it ?” asked the lawyer.

“ No.”

“ I must say I think our worthy host is, in two respects, deserving of our imitation—

those of us who are bachelors—first, in not marrying without ample means to support a wife ; and, secondly, in marrying Mrs. Cameron. I can't imagine anyone falling in love with Mrs. Nichols," remarked Philip Harvey, who had, till now, been a silent listener.

" It's a blessing for the women that men don't all think alike on the marriage question," remarked Mr. Merriman. " Mrs. Nichols is an oddity, certainly, but, doubtless, Nichols don't think so."

" I don't know what on earth you mean, Frank, by fixing me as you have done ever since I last spoke," remarked Philip Harvey. " I say, doctor, is he going to be seized as Queen Anne was?"

Frank Harvey was, just then, in no mood to be trifled with.

" Do I understand you to commend a man for marrying simply for the sake of a rich wife, Philip?"

“Yes; you’ve hit the right nail on the head.”

Frank Harvey still looked at his brother vacantly, half-sadly. It was a look that expressed the passage through his mind of no common emotion.

“And you would not have a man marry a woman for her good qualities of heart and mind, if she be poorly dowered?” asked the elder brother again of the younger.

“Quite so, Frank. I hope I shall go through my catechism to your satisfaction,” remarked Philip Harvey, sullenly.

“Come, gentlemen, we’re losing the brotherly feeling the doctor spoke of just now,” appealed the host, directing meaning glances towards the two brothers. “We will discuss poor Nichols, if you please.”

“Sit on him for marrying? I protest against that,” said Mr. Pitman, with something like rising choler in his tone.

“Calm yourself, Pitman; we’re not going

to lose precious time in that way," replied Mr. Merriman, soothingly.

" Still, I do say, Nichols ought not to have married," interposed the lawyer. " It's not a fair thing to do. A parson lets a pretty face get the better of him in his young and foolish days; talks moonshine to a silly little thing who has no 'tocher' for her future husband, and thinks supplies will drop from the clouds for them; marries her, has a dozen children, finds his curacy won't supply bread and cheese for the mouths Heaven gives him to fill, and says savage things, or writes them against the Church 'for suffering such a state of things.' No; what I say is this, let every man, in such a matter as matrimony, abide by the consequences of his actions, and keep them to himself."

" But, Wright, the poor man's dying."

" H'm, now you turn it to a mere appeal—*ad misericordiam*. Is the Church to blame for that, I should like to know?" asked Mr. Wright.

“ YES !” thundered out the impetuous Frank, with a thump on the table that made the glasses dance.

All looked at him with a startled expression of countenance, but, for a moment, no one spoke. The doctor first broke the silence.

“ By-the-bye,” he said, “ Wright’s question reminds me that your uncle has considerable property in Nichols’ parish. Now, I want to get him away to some sheltered sea-side place for six months at least. That *may* set him up. Nothing else will. If I were to write to your uncle, eh, Frank ?”

Frank Harvey looked uncomfortable. He could see, at a glance, that the doctor’s proposition had been received with not a little amusement by the rest of the company. But he affected not to notice it.

“ Yes ; do write, and I can mention the subject to him also.”

“ Well, Cameron,” said the lawyer, “ the doctor’s undoubtedly made out a strong case

for us here. You and I are about the best natured fellows in the world, eh ; though we won't knock under to our friend Frank's notions—”

“ Mr. Wright, will you submit to a little cross-examination ?” asked Frank Harvey in a quiet, but firm tone of voice.

“ We'll all have a shot at him, Frank,” said Mr. Merriman. “ You open the ball.”

“ Do you own to any personal obligation to the clergy ?”

“ No, I don't. The clergy are rather under personal obligations to me—some of them—and it's a happy man I'll be if I see the colour of their money by-and-bye.”

“ But, Wright, you are off the scent. You are a Churchman, and a Christian ?”

“ Well, I hope so.”

“ As a Churchman you require the ministrations of a clergyman ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Are you right in measuring those minis-

trations by a money value, which so exclusively, in your case, have reference to another world?"

"No special pleading, Mr. Frank, if you please. Keep your head out of the clouds, and then I can follow you. I still say that Nichols' services, though he is a parson, are paid for, according to an earthly standard of value."

"Yes, very earthly, and very low."

"An earthly standard of value, and therefore he never had any right to exceed his income."

"Come, come, Wright," said Mr. Merriman; "you're harder on that point now than you were the other day. You sympathised with Nichols when you heard of his having been in Badger's clutches."

"I did, because Badger has not the feelings of a gentleman."

"No; nor has Badger the feelings of a Christian," said Frank Harvey. "I heard of

that affair, and wish I had been at Mr. Nichols' side when Badger tried to play the bully with him."

"*Tried* to play it," said Mr. Merriman, "but found it wouldn't answer. He had in Nichols more than his match, I can tell you."

"But look here, Wright. Badger wanted Mr. Nichols to reduce his income to ninety pounds a-year, and surrender the rest. Now, put the case to yourself. *You* have ten children. It is *your* part to have charge of a parish; to preach, to visit the sick, to go from house to house among the poor and the suffering; to have your mind ready to give consolation or advice whenever wanted; and you are required to keep up the appearance of a gentleman, and to subsist on ninety pounds a-year. Could you do it?"

Mr. Wright expressively shrugged his shoulders.

"If you had no children at all; if you were unmarried, could you do it? No, Wright, it

would barely find you in gloves and cigars. You're beaten."

"Not so. I submit to the chairman that the case doesn't apply."

"But, Wright, could you do without incurring debt, if you possessed only ninety pounds a year?"

"No."

"Good. And, if under such circumstances, you had no alternative between incurring debt, and lying down under some roadside hedge to die, what would you do?"

"Well, battle it out for dear life, of course."

"And if a limb of the law had tried to convince you that you were a rogue because you incurred debts, and didn't choose to resign the life God had given you—what then?"

"Oh, in one of my pugnacious moods, which don't come on me often, I—I should probably have—have kicked him."

"Then, how, Wright, can a clergyman be

expected to live on ninety pounds a year, when you can't do so?"

"H'm, no. I suppose not."

"Would you like to have the Church *without* clergymen—if such a thing were possible?"

"No. But—"

"Then whose *duty* is it to give adequate support to the clergy when they have it not? To whom does their Master look for their adequate support? On whom will that Master visit retribution if not on those who affect to regard His ministers as dishonest men, when they exceed their incomes, in order to support bare life, and who ignore their own responsibility in the matter of their support altogether?"

"There, Frank, you've given him a good shaking. Drop him now," pleaded Mr. Merriman. "Cameron, don't you smell brimstone in the room? Let us all have a turn in the fresh air, before we join the ladies."

## CHAPTER VI.

## IN THE BYE-PLAY.

“ MRS. CAMERON, it is most unfortunate ; I ought not to have come among you to-day ; I have one of my very tiresome headaches, and the best thing for me to do, ungracious as you must think me for saying so, will be to go into retirement for the rest of the day.”

“ Poor child !” commented Mrs. Buchanan, kindly. “ I feared something ailed you. You looked pale and poorly I thought at dinner.”

And little Mrs. Cameron, though with the air of one greatly disappointed, rose and escorted her guest from the drawing-room to the chamber that had been assigned to her for the night, giving her, in a coaxing tone of voice, a hopeful promise that on the prompt administration to her troublesome malady of those simple correctives, sal-volatile, eau-de-Cologne, and strong tea, she would be able to return to the drawing-room a new creature by-and-bye.

Marion Wilmot suffered very terribly from these violent headaches. Their constant recurrence periodically was the bane of her existence. Subtly but surely they preyed upon her constitution, and the violence of their attacks was much aggravated by the irritant of a sanguine, sensitive, and susceptible temperament.

Under what balmy sky grows the herb whose medicinal virtues are potent to keep in check the disorders of the mind as well as those of

the body ? Where dwells that favoured physician, in this sorrowing, fever-stricken world, who, with magic skill, can concoct soothing draughts that shall lull to rest the constant ache within, tonics for the fearful and faint-hearted, liniments for the bruised and wounded spirit, sedatives that shall, without fail, lull to rest the constant ache within, and restoratives that shall bring back energy and hope to those whom bitter, persecuting care has bereaved of them ?

Marion Wilmot had long been sensible of the up-growth of a care within, that, as she felt, one only could heal, and to that one she could not even speak of its existence. How often had that one listened to her, with his attention altogether absorbed, while, with rich, sweet voice, and in tones that trembled through excess of feeling, she sang to him the songs for which he asked her again and again —his favourites ; and yet he had never once spoken to her of love. Could he suppose

that she had given up to him so much of her time, that they had botanized and read together, and that there existed between them such harmony of tastes and opinions, in many other respects, and that his influence over her was one she was capable of laying aside at pleasure ?

Then she sought to soothe her spirit by the memory of anything in which she fancied she could trace any proof of special considerateness for her. Was he not with her more than with others, and did not that alone prove that the love in his heart for her must at least be nearing the bud, which, in her case, though he seemed all unaware of it, was day by day expanding into the flower ? No ; she could not think he was trifling with her. He was moulding her, intellectually, to his tastes ; he was watching her thus constantly, till he could realize in her the fulfilment of his own ideal of what a wife should be ; he was wisely and philosophically keeping down, under

powerful restraint, all the passionateness of love. All would be well by-and-bye. He was calmer, cooler, a higher type of man than the rest of his sex ; but he would tell her the old stereotyped tale of love on one of their next summer days, and then she would promise to be his ; and the married life so studiously weighed, so gradually and even cautiously approached, would give forth to both of them a truer, deeper happiness, than it is commonly the lot of ordinary husbands and wives to enjoy. Philip was dreamy, and, in her love for him, Marion had caught the infection of his dreaminess. She must be patient, and trustful, and womanly to the last, and by-and-bye, Philip, after having won her young heart, would be to her a husband such as few women are blessed with.

Such were Marion's dreams, and, up to this time, her friends knew not but that hundreds of love-passages had taken place between Philip Harvey and herself. But it is not

easy for strong emotions to be pent up within an ailing frame and not betray themselves more or less *sometimes*.

She staggered rather than walked to the bed, towards which Mrs. Cameron conducted her, and had no sooner laid her head down on the pillow, than a cold perspiration—that so frequent concomitant of a severe sick headache—broke out all over her, and she sighed heavily, and looked ghastly and ill.

It was not the first time Mrs. Cameron had witnessed these attacks in her friend, and she knew how to administer relief promptly and quietly, without distressing the patient by making her the centre of observation to a consternation-stricken household.

Under the gentle bathing of forehead, and temples, and hands, the restorative effect of which was greatly helped on by the pulseless hush of the room, Marion revived. Mrs. Cameron watched and studied her countenance with a tender interest, as by degrees a

little color returned to her cheeks. She gazed on no mere doll-like prettiness. There was the impress of soul, and of intellect there, that none could mistake. But, very commonly, when she was alone, or in the society of her trusted friends, Marion's face wore another expression, which no one versed in physiognomy could look upon unmoved. These were hours in which her affectionate nature brimmed over in kindly words, and ways, so spontaneously, and withal so playfully, that you would have judged her thereby to be still a mere child, with all a child's tendency to laugh and be merry, and with all the unstudied sincerity, and the limpid truthfulness of an unspoiled child. Then some, who did not know her, might have speculated as to whether she had ever known any real care. There were other hours, when her features wore an aspect of settled unrest, and when you would have thought that she and

cheerfulness could be at best, if they might ever chance to meet, but strange and uncongenial companions. And there was still another side to Marion's nature, very rarely to be noticed, by which you could have seen that, though sweet and womanly, she could become a very Boadicea for prompt fortitude and courage, if occasion required their exercise. She could show herself to be one who knew no fear if called upon suddenly to face peril or wrong. She was trustful of human nature, in the main, but when once her simple trust in it was shown, by some unforeseen exigency, to have been misplaced, she could show herself in the strong revulsion of her feelings, a morally grand and stately heroine.

Marion awoke from her swoon to find Mrs. Cameron close at her side, and Mrs. Buchanan and Priscilla standing, apparently in conversation, near the more distant of the two windows of the bed-chamber.

“There, love ; no, don’t attempt to get up, lie quite still awhile,” said the hostess, soothingly.

“Priscy seemed to think, I suppose, that her mother’s services in restoring you would not be sufficient, and would fain that she and I should help too ; but I’m a surgeon’s wife, my dear, and know what a blessed thing a little free fresh air is to the faint ; but we’ve been talking about you, though we haven’t come near you. There’s a difference in size between Mrs. Cameron and me. There’s not so much of her, either in length or breadth, to come between a sick patient and an open window ; it’ll be my turn to come by-and-bye, when you feel well enough to talk.”

“What have you two been saying about me, Priscy ?” asked Marion, with a feeble smile upon her face.

“Hush, no !” whispered Mrs. Buchanan to Priscilla, with a deprecatory gesture.

“I must tell you by-and-bye, Minnie,”

said the interdicted young lady ; “ but I don’t see any harm in telling you at once—or at least after a little, Mrs. Buchanan ?”

“ No ; to-morrow is better for telling some sorts of truths than to-day,” returned the plain, homely lady addressed.

But Mrs. Cameron, not always the wisest of her sex, spoiled the game.

“ Pooh, it’s ridiculous. Why shouldn’t the child hear what you’ve been talking about ? I know there’s not a word of truth in it. Priscilla and Mrs. Buchanan want me to believe—”

“ Don’t, Mrs. Cameron. Don’t be hasty.”

“ But it’s such nonsense ! ” returned the hostess, in friendly pettishness.

“ I’m quite well enough to hear it,” said Marion, “ at least if it’s nothing to make me think very deeply, and rather curious too.”

“ Well, then I must speak of it,” said the hostess, impulsively ; “ for it’s treason against a worthy young man to think it, and I don’t

believe a word of it. My dear, they have been gravely saying, both of them, that they believe they know the cause and root of these headaches better than the doctor does ; and that the cause is one that medical skill cannot reach. What think you of that?"

Either from weakness or unwillingness, certainly not from indifference, Marion did not say what she thought, but she looked as though she divined the subject of their conversation, and for the moment closed her eyes, and turned away her face a little sadly.

Priscilla Cameron enjoyed the special privilege of being Marion Wilmot's bosom friend and confidante. The two were almost equal in age, Priscilla being the older by some three or four months only. Both young ladies would, doubtless, have been ready, had urgent need required them so to do, to set their hands and seals to the truth of that musical strain of an Irish melody—

" There's nothing half so sweet in life  
As love's young dream."

And what purpose can one's bosom friends and confidantes have been created to serve, if not to pass the sunny hours of their prime together, by summer's flower-beds, and winter's fireside-glow, in softly-uttered mutual confidences, on the subject nearest to their hearts, and bound up in the closest way with their happiness? But Priscilla and Marion were two very different beings. If only Mr. and Mrs. Cameron could have foreseen the peculiarities of temper and temperament by which the rosy little creature they fondly gazed upon, in her primal infancy, would be distinguished in her womanhood, surely they would never have covenanted together to bestow upon her the demurely-sounding name Priscilla. The reader who cares to make acquaintance with her in these pages will probably decide that no name could less aptly have marked her especial peculiarities. But as our little nursery trebles cannot choose their own names, and we, very wisely, are not

privileged to glance prophetically on some page of their life-history yet to come, before we take it upon ourselves to choose them, so it is not to be wondered at, in a world prone to blunders and mistakes, that we should wish, from time to time, they could for a few moments be un-named. So long as baptismal registers are, very properly, unalterable, we shall be liable to meet with quick-witted, merry maidens, who are *Priscillas*; with awkwardly-moving, *hoyden*-like maidens, who are *Graces*; with maidens who have no soul for music, and yet are named *Cecilia*; with maidens who, alack-a-day! are much fonder of the pomps and vanities of this world than they ought to be, and yet sign themselves, each one, *Agnes* or *Catharine*.

After a little while Marion had so far recovered from her swoon as to look about her and volunteer a remark or two, and then the elder ladies withdrew, and the two friends were left alone.

“ I know what you and Mrs. Buchanan were talking about, Priscy. How I wish I could get you off that one idea !”

“ Minnie, how is it possible that a sharp girl like me—sharp as if my nightly couch were the knife box—should be one of the race of monomaniacs ?”

“ You silly rattle-trap ! Did I say you were any such thing ?”

“ Yes, you did, my dear. What is the dictionary-word for those who have one idea but—”

“ There, never mind, Priscy ; come and chat quietly, there’s a love. I want a little coddling—a little serious chat, you know—to-night.”

“ Will you have Mr. Merriman or Mr. Pitman, my dear ?” asked the incorrigible girl, as she made for the door.

But Marion’s really weary look recalled her, and she was soon seated quietly at her side.

“ Priscy, I don’t know what I should do without you. I think I couldn’t bear to live if I hadn’t someone to talk to—someone who can enter a little into my feelings. I can’t talk to papa, you know. If he were not ill, he’s so dreadfully matter-of-fact—”

“ So am I, Minnie : none more so. I’ve no dreaminess—no poetry, if you will—in my being.”

“ Yes, you have ; you know you have. Your ideas of happiness in this world and mine are much the same. You know how many times we’ve shut ourselves out from the world and talked about coming days, and tried to sketch out for each other fancy pictures of quiet home scenes—”

“ But don’t you think it best sometimes to take things as they are ? to—heyday, you know what I mean—to ‘ trust no future, howe’er pleasant.’ That just expresses what I wanted to say.”

Again a weary look stole over Marion's intelligent face.

"Minnie, I can't get you to think as I do. You won't, will you?"

"About Philip?"

"Yes."

"I cannot; it would kill me."

Priscilla's face grew dark at this.

"Kill you, child? I don't know that he isn't doing it, as it is. If you would give me leave, I should like to have half an hour with Mr. Philip about you. But he shuns me. He and I don't get on together at all. A girl of spirit, like me, could tell a dreamy gentleman like that a thing or two, if her tongue were not tied."

"You don't understand Philip, Priscy. You will understand him better one day, and then, if you like to take the trouble, I'll let you scold him to your heart's content."

"No, I don't understand him; I'm out of all patience with him. Why, Marion, if he

came to see me as often as he comes to you, and mooned away about beautiful ballads, and stars, and flowers, and—”

“ But, Priscy, you forget. Put yourself for a moment in my place. Imagine that you—”

“ Imagine that I love him? Certainly, my dear, with all my heart, if it will oblige you.”

“ Very well. Then if he were to come and talk to you, as he does so often to me; if you and he were to play together, and sing together, and frequently think the same thoughts, should you not feel that some mysterious chain of sympathy was gradually binding you to each other? And you would think very much about it, and give yourself up to it, and—”

“ No, Minnie, I tell you again I should do nothing of the kind. I tell you, for something like the fiftieth time, that I should feel he was wasting my time and his own too.”

“ But you could not love him, if you thought so.”

“ Yes, indeed I could, for matter of that. At least, you know I’m trying now to feel as you feel, and I fancy I could. But I tell you candidly, Minnie, if he served me as he serves you, I should get tired of it in less than a week. I should feel as though I were full of pins and needles every time he came near me, and at last might be tempted to say, ‘Ods, bodikins, man, what does all this mean?’ But, seriously, you know what a plain-spoken girl I am, and you know that if I did not care for you, I could glibly fall in with your notions of things, and let you be happy or miserable as things might turn out; but I do care for you, and that makes me say things you don’t like to hear; because I am full of fear for your future, if Philip Harvey is to share it with you.”

“ But why, Priscy? Why?”

“ Because he doesn’t know his own mind in anything. Now, I should like a young man who thought of me for a wife to come and tell me so at once ; to come the straight way to the story in all honest outspokenness. I can’t understand a man trifling with a girl’s time, and leading her to imagine he loves her.”

“ No, I am to blame there. Oh, Priscy, why should I love him as I do ? Can he—oh, it is terrible to think it—can he have discovered what I feel ?”

Both face and neck were suffused with a hot, burning blush as she spoke.

“ You must not ask me, my dear, to tell you what the powers of discovery in such a matter may be of a man whom I by no means understand. But, Minnie, I want to tell you something.”

“ Yes.”

“ Mamma told it me, and someone you

know very well told it her ; and I'm going to tell you."

" Is it about Philip ?"

" About Philip ? No."

Marion's countenance fell.

" Ah, I see. No one but Philip for you. Oh, Marion, Marion, it's of no use, I fear ; but I *must* tell you."

For a moment Marion's face gathered interest. Was Priscilla about to speak to her of someone else who had told of his preference for her ? No woman, however sensible, can hear of her conquests unmoved.

" Minnie, what would you say to Frank's love ?"

" Frank Harvey's ?"

Marion looked greatly distressed.

" What, is it really so ?" she asked.

" It is : and if I were a barrister, I could work a brief well for him."

" He's a noble fellow, but—"

“ You are right, Minnie. He is noble; one of the right sort of noble men; a man who would be a treasure of a husband.”

“ Oh, that’s out of the question, quite, Priscy. But how do you know this?”

“ From mamma.”

“ Has Frank Harvey been speaking to her about me?”

“ He has, more than once, but he is too noble to speak to you. I fear he sees your preference for his brother. But Marion—”

“ Yes, dear.”

“ Now, will you believe me, if I tell it you?”

“ You appear to be quite serious?”

“ Never more so.”

“ I’ll try, then, to believe.”

“ Now, answer this question, as any sensible, unbiassed girl would answer it. You know how very much Frank and Philip Harvey are together?”

“ Naturally; they must be, of course.”

“ If Philip had a decided preference for you, Marion—now, bear with me—wouldn’t his brother have found it out ?”

“ Oh, Priscy, don’t.”

“ Don’t what ?”

“ Don’t tell me any more.”

“ But you asked me to tell you ; and I tell you because I love you, and because you are the first friend I would see happy. Frank Harvey has told mamma that he cannot get Philip to make an explicit declaration to him that he loves you. He is always so stupidly, obstinately perverse when asked on that point. And poor Frank hasn’t the courage to say this—‘ If you want her, Philip, I must give way ; but if you don’t, let me have a chance.’ He only rates him about visiting you so much without declaring his intentions. I prophesy, however, that matters will grow a little clearer there, by-and-bye, and that you will then hear from plain, outspoken Frank. And,

Minnie, I should dearly like to put in a good word for him; I should, indeed."

Here all further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, with a note for Marion. Why was it that, as she touched it, and before even the seal was broken, her heart sank under some foreboding of ill? She glanced at the address. It was in her aunt's well-known handwriting, and she had guessed correctly that its contents could but refer to her father, before she read them. There are some who treat these sudden presentiments as things unworthy of being looked at through philosophic spectacles. There are others who read in them most sure signs and tokens that between heaven and earth—between the visible and invisible worlds—there are telegraphic communications of sympathy: messages wafted from disembodied to embodied spirits, with a strange vividness that arrests and enchains attention on the instant.

Marion opened her note and read :—

“ The Poplars.

“ MY DEAR CHILD,—

“ Your poor father is *very, very* ill, much worse than when you left. Since then bad news has distressed him very much. I think it will be better for you to return as soon as you can this evening.

“ Your loving Aunt,

“ EDITH WILMOT.”

## CHAPTER VII.

## A CHANGE AT THE POPLARS.

MARION was driven home that night in sad discomfort both of mind and body. Happily, her head-ache was very greatly relieved, but the thick damp air, the darkness, the persistent drizzling of a determined Scotch mist, lent their powerful aid to deepen and intensify the sorrowful foreboding within, that pressed closely against her heart, as it had been a leaden weight. The poplars round her home

looked tall and chill and ghost-like, as they stood out the more dimly to view, from under their veil of cobweb-like autumnal mist. It was a night in her history to whose memory, in after years, she shuddered to revert. But she could not look back to its desolating occurrences without admiration of, and gratitude for, the loving wisdom that refuses to mortals all foresight of the future, till, haply, the first heavy drops of the crushing storm have fallen, and the first dismal moanings—precursors of the coming hurricane—have made themselves heard and felt.

As Marion alighted at the door of her home, and was passing into the house, she noticed, by the glare of two carriage lamps at a few yards' distance along the front gravelled walk, that the arrival of some visitor had preceded her own.

“Is that the doctor, Mary?” she asked of the staid-looking, tidy domestic who had opened the door to her.

"It is, miss, and a long time he's a-stayin'. I'm afraid master must be very ill, but I durstn't ask yet. There's a great deal o' whisperin' goin' on, at times, between your aunt, Miss Wilmot, and the doctor; but he doesn't come out, and I dursn't open the door. Oh, dear, miss, it's very hard for you. I hope he isn't a-goin' to die."

Mary was one of those rare, and therefore most valuable, treasures, a good servant, and Marion was so merciful as to pass over the little peccadillo, dictated by an affectionate interest in her master's welfare, that she had committed in playing the part of eaves-dropper.

"Do you think I can go in?"

"I don't know, miss. P'r'aps they won't be long. They're talkin' very earnestly about somethin' or other. Hadn't you better take your wet things off, and sit by the fire a bit? I'll watch, and let you know when the door opens."

“No, come in here, Mary. We can talk low, and both listen. When was papa taken worse?”

“You hadn’t been gone so very long, miss, when there came up two or three of the people from the works, an’ wanted to see him. At first the master wouldn’t see ’em ; he said, you know, as he was too ill, an’ couldn’t, and he asked Miss Wilmot to go out and see what they wanted ; but, in the middle of it, he seems to ha’ taken a fancy that he would see them himself, for he rang the bell, and had ’em in.”

“Yes, and what did they come about ? Who were they ?”

“Three of ’em I didn’t know, miss. P’r’aps they might ha’ been new hands, or never have been up to the house before, but one of ’em was Sadler, that Mr. Hardiman turned off a little while since, and the other man’s face I know, but not his name. They all seemed to be workpeople that had been

turned off, and had come to grumble to master about it."

"Were they uncivil to papa? Did they go away quietly?"

"They talked a bit loud, miss, but there was nothin' worse than that, you know. They went off quiet enough, an' after that—— There's the bell, miss; it's master's bedroom bell. Shall I ask if you can go in?"

"Yes, do."

In another moment Mary was at the foot of the stairs again, looking whiter and more troubled than when she had obeyed the summons.

"It's for you, miss. The doctor himself asked if it was you that came in last, and told me to ask you up at once. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Marion found a grave, elderly gentleman holding the door open for her to enter. A bright fire was blazing in the grate, and as the reflection of it, and of the tapers that were

burning on the mantel-piece, shone upon the bed, she could see that the bed-clothes were in violent agitation, and that her father lay there, with very white face, compressed lips, and staring eyes. She was in the act of rushing to the bed-side, when the doctor detained her by the hand—

“No, my dear, not yet; come with me.”

He led her softly and tenderly, as if she had been his own daughter, to the couch that stood on the left hand side of the fire-place, and at right angles with it, and placed himself down by her side as she sat, while Miss Wilmot stood on the watch for any change that might demand her instant attention. Then he took her hand and looked sadly, as a father would look, into her face.

“Marion,” he said, “you can guess, my poor child, why we have sent for you. It could serve no purpose if you were to look at your father now, and for the present I must not permit it.”

Marion wore no wild, frenzied look on the face she upturned towards her old friend as he spoke to her. It was one that showed she tacitly accepted, sorrowfully and with quivering lips, the sad situation in which she found herself.

She turned towards the bed, and then towards the doctor. He had known her from her childhood; he had been not less the kind sympathising friend, in all that had befallen the household at the Poplars, than the skilful physician. And now his soul went forth through his eyes, to meet her soul, that had found for itself a similar exit and expression.

“ Doctor, doctor, will that dreadful look last long? Can’t you save him? Can’t you? Is it to come to that? Is it?”

“ You know I am doing my best, don’t you?”

“ Yes, but why does he look so strange? Has he ever been so ill as this before?”

“ No, child; nor has he ever been, to my

knowledge, ill in the same manner as he is at present."

"Then what is it, doctor? You have tried remedies?"

"Don't you feel, my love, how close the room is with the smell of medicine?" interjected her aunt.

"But will he ever be able to speak to me? Would he know if I put my hand in his, if I kissed him, if I called him?"

She paused as she felt the agony was upon her, and closed her tear-blinded eyes at last, and silently tried to crush it down; but the effort went near to choke her.

"Wait a little while, my dear," replied the doctor, kindly but very gravely. "He may speak to us all yet; we shall see. But at present we must leave the powerful medicine I have given him to take effect if it can. We both know who can cause it to work wonders if He wills it so, don't we?"

"Yes, but you know—you know he's going."

The doctor did not reply. He saw that an outburst of bitter agony was at hand, and that it would be better to let it find vent in floods of tears if it would. But can any man sit by, and listen to a woman's sobs, without feeling an instantaneous rising in his throat, and a mad desire to stir heaven and earth to soothe her? Dr. Bradley was a man, but he was a skilled physician, too, and, in medical matters, he never allowed his feelings to get the better of his judgment; therefore he suddenly rose from the couch, bent his head moodily over the mantel-piece, and allowed her to weep on.

Then he left the room for a moment, to give directions that his horse and brougham should be put up for the night, and returned to the sick man's room.

And when Marion Wilmot learned what he had done the agony increased, for she well knew that Dr. Bradley's wont was, not to

mete out his time of attendance on a patient by hours, if minutes would suffice.

There were three persons that night at the Poplars for whom there was no visitation of blessed sleep--Miss Wilmot, Marion, and the doctor. The rain pattered all night long, with its sharp, pebbly sound, against the windows, and the wind crept round the house, made a wild, mournful music down the chimneys, and swayed the tall poplars to and fro. Neither moon nor stars appeared, and no small tempest lay on inanimate nature without the house, and on living, suffering nature within it. On such nights, when the clock strikes, there is a prophecy of coming doom in its tone, and, to the inner ear, the very pendulum swings to and fro with an unearthly cadence. The angel of death had had his mission entrusted to him. It was as though the very trees and the wind held converse together about his coming. For some hours there was little change in the condition of the

patient. He knew nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing now of the sights and sounds of the world in which he had spent sixty years of his life. From time to time the doctor approached him, and silently contemplated the case, or administered such remedies as medical skill suggested to him. But there was a depressed, hopeless expression on his face as he rejoined the other two watchers by the fire. He could not stay the coming of the dark angel, any more than he could hush the pelting rain, and the moaning wind without. He knew that the enemy was at hand, that he, too, can grimly laugh at locksmiths, that he was powerless to avert from the house all that threatened it.

Then, in the hush of the room, he questioned Aunt Edith in low, subdued tones.

“ You say, poor fellow, he was not quite so well as he had been when the men came ? ”

“ No, he was uneasy, restless, and in a little pain.”

“Humph! It’s strange that, under such circumstances, he should have admitted them. Strange, I mean, that he should have swerved from his first purpose.”

“Yes, he is not one to do that generally.”

“His mind may have wandered perhaps. And after he had dismissed the men his present seizure did not take him at once?”

“No; he was, of course, not at all himself. The news they brought could not but put him about. He has trusted that man Hardiman for years, much more than I would have done, but my brother, you see, was always a man who wouldn’t be talked to, and was always particularly quiet about his affairs. I expect, between you and me, doctor, that there’s other mischief at the root of this illness. It was when he was talking about that old Grindstone, that he fretted worst, and talked a great deal about you, child. Hey day! what’s to come of it I don’t know. He let it out that that old miser has a mortgage on this pro-

perty, and it was while he talked on about that, and Hardiman's rascality together, and said that he was ruined, that he turned so queer and fell. It's a sad, sad business for you, poor girl."

Marion *looked* an indescribable reply.

Mr. Wilmot's seizure was pronounced by Dr. Bradley to be an epileptic one of most serious character. He writhed in it, as in the grasp of an invisible giant, and passed out of one convulsion into another. That a frame, already so worn by disease, could battle with the last enemy so long, was much to be wondered at. But, towards day-dawn, the dreadful contest reached its climax.

He became still, and the doctor watched and tended him closely, and pronounced that he was apparently recovering from the series of convulsions that had hitherto overmastered him. No other fit supervened, and he was allowed to lie quietly, till the wished-for consciousness returned at last.

Rather should I have said that it was a state of semi-consciousness alone to which he returned. For it seemed to him as though many other faces than those of the three watchers were close at his side. He called out suddenly, with some energy—

“ Marion—Philip !”

“ Philip is not here, papa,” said Marion, going up to him and taking his hand.

“ Not here ? Yes, he is, in that corner. Join hands with him, child. He—what ! won’t he come ?”

The doctor led the sorrowful girl away. Her father, so taciturn, so absorbed apparently in self up to that moment, was now close to the brink of the dark river. He showed them that, while he had been sitting so listlessly under the verandah, he had watched his daughter and Philip moving to and fro, had taken their movements all in, and had drawn his own conclusions respecting them. What more natural than that he, who foresaw that

the hour of his death was come, that the day of interment, and of the reading of his will was close at hand, that secrets important to Marion would soon be made known, which could no longer be concealed, should, with a father's love, wish to see his daughter, as far as he could do so, in safe keeping before the coldness of orphanhood wrapped her round ?

But that question—"What! won't he come?" contained his last words. Expectant brides and bridegrooms were waking up, as he spoke them, to realize the truth that their marriage-day was dawning. Heirs to large properties awoke that morning, to the consciousness that the hour had come, in which they were to take possession of them. Sturdy labourers, all agape, were shaking themselves free from the pleasant shackles of a healthy sleep. On the roost, and in the nest, bird-life was astir ; and Marion Wilmot was kneeling down by the side of the cold clay, from whose tenement an immortal spirit had just departed,

in all the confusion, and the helplessness, and the agony, that attend one's first realisation of the state of orphanhood. What an aspect of strangely-contrasted joy and misery must this world present—not to those who, because they are finite, cannot look down into every house, and take, as it were, a bird's-eye view, clear and unconfused of every household, but to Him who “Is in His holy temple,” ordering and controlling all things, according to His own harmonious but mysterious plan, from Whose Spirit none can flee, from Whose Presence none may go, and from Whom nothing can be hid.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## SCHEMES AND COUNTER-SCHEMES.

JOHN HARDIMAN, as has been stated in a former chapter, possessed certain untutored, but ready powers of invention, by means of which he was enabled to make more efficient the machinery and tools in use at Mr. Wilmot's manufactory in Lowchester, or to introduce others whose mechanical capabilities were such, that they turned out the hardware articles made there with a better finish, in a

shorter time, or without the need of the same amount of manual labour, required for the manufacture of goods under the old system. His character, in point of moral principle, was not the strongest in the world. He had a master who, as he felt, did not appreciate his feats of cleverness according to the exact market-price he himself had put upon them. That master never stirred away from his home, and that home was at the distance of six miles from John Hardiman's thoughts and machinations, and employments generally. John, moreover, according to his own ideas of right and wrong, was not obliged to be more communicative *on any point* to a churl than he chose to be. He was proud of his wife and children, and had his temper continually tried by the insufficiency of his wages to provide more than the bare necessities of life for them. He was very much under his wife's influence, and Mary Hardiman held, or affected to hold, views of right and wrong

that were even more warped and distorted than John's were supposed to be. Finally, John came to the conclusion that it was his duty to study the interests of his family at the cost even of those of his master, and Satan, to whom John's soul was an object worth trying for by force or by craft, was permitted for a while to prosper him in the matter of ways and means. The machine-maker, fully aware of Mr. Wilmot's unbusiness-like habits, took John Hardiman's orders, as proceeding through him, from his master. He commended him for his wit, took into favourable consideration some loose talk, on John's part, as to a probable share falling to himself eventually, of the profits of this invention, and was in no degree anxious or uneasy about his money.

The movements of people who act upon views of right and wrong not in conformity with those acknowledged in law courts, and generally received, are, naturally, both im-

pulsive and eccentric. Such were those now of John and Mary Hardiman. Only a short time had elapsed since the conversation between them recorded in a late chapter, when, after some few haltings of purpose and very much secret uneasiness, the unwelcome presence of which they found it by no means easy to drive away, John made his first rush down that fatal hill, whose slippery steeps render it such a matter of difficulty for those who have once commenced their downward course upon them to retrace their steps, and at whose foot lie the black waters of perdition. On that "certain rainy Saturday afternoon, near the end of August," when their conversation took place, John and Mary stood on the brink of those perilous steeps. They stood there in angry, revengeful discontent; irritated, indignant, and with a resolution already half formed to alter their condition materially at whatever cost. Each saw the danger of onward progress in the

wrong direction, but would not confess it to the other. They loved each other honestly, and yet could consent together to gild over a lie, a self-deception, and call it truth, whose effects might be ruin, temporal and eternal, to both.

During the sacred hours of the Sunday, when John and Mary Hardiman had far better have been in their seats at the Dissenting chapel they usually frequented, they suddenly discovered that they had a matter to talk over, that required as much time and quiet as they could get for the proper discussion of it. It was a matter that—as the eldest girl, Polly, was told—could not be properly discussed on any other day than Sunday, because of her father's long absences at the works, and she was requested for that day to leave all culinary cares to her mother, and to go to chapel, taking with her as many of the junior Hardimans as would be likely, if left at home, to ruffle the current of their father's and

mother's grave cogitations. This Polly Hardiman did, and meanwhile John established himself in close proximity to the kitchen fire, and drank in, all too readily, Mary's plottings and schemings, with which she favoured him, as often as she could snatch opportunity to do so, in the midst of her preparations for the family dinner. These plans were that, like some of their neighbours, they should "really make a desperate effort to look a little more respectable: do away with their nasty old creaky chairs and tables," replace with a new and better stock of similar articles, the well-worn knives and forks, and spoons and crockery, and generally "look up a bit." And John leant forward from his old-fashioned arm-chair, and listened with uneasy eagerness, and turned it all over in his too acquiescent mood of mind, and mentally noted down there and then, the names of the men whom he brought himself to determine to sacrifice to their unrighteous cabal. So absorbed did

they become in this employment that, as it seemed to them, their children had no sooner been got conveniently out of the way, than they returned to interrupt it, and on that account it was resumed in the evening, when the wondering Polly, in an agony of inquisitive speculation, was again induced to attend the meeting-house, with the little flock by which she had been accompanied in the morning. And the end of it all was, that Mary Hardiman carried her point completely, and it was in the full flush of her hour of triumph, that she went forth, and got into the house, on credit, the wine and the drapery goods and other articles which she deemed fit for them in order to the due maintenance of the deception of respectability, to which, as she fondly promised herself, they were about to rise. It was evident, by the promptitude with which the different tradesmen executed their respective orders, that she must have won them over, in one way or another, to implicit

belief in her representations. Human nature in them was of the more credulous and gullible sort, and little ground therefore is there for wonder that their new customer's wily and plausible tongue should have victimized them with complete success.

And Hardiman, too, according to their secret compact, had his part to play in this treacherous conspiracy, and with a determinedly dogged resolution to be no way swerved or unnerved in the matter of religion, conscience, or his better reason, he did it. He went to his post at the works, discharged such hands as his new improvements in machinery rendered unnecessary, completed the order for the United States, to which reference has already been made, and was in weekly expectation of receiving the draft, of which he had solemnly bound his soul with an evil bond to appropriate a part. The man Sadler received his dismissal in no very compliant spirit. He was not a very satisfactory

workman, either as regarded character or artistic skill, and the manager fondly promised himself that he and others who shared his fate would accept their dismissal in surly ill-humour, lay the chief part of the blame on their own “evil stars,” and do no more mischief. But, to his annoyance and vexation, Sadler actively rebelled, and threatened to appeal to their common master. Many days, however, passed by ; nothing was said to him about his discharge of the men, and he imagined at last that Sadler’s had been an idle threat and no more. Events proved that in this supposition he was wrong. Sadler and the rest were boon companions. During the time when they were out of work they were to be met with late and early, at a certain public-house, much frequented by the artizan class, over whose front portal swayed to and fro in the wind, noted for its inartistic conception, unnatural proportions of limb, and impossible colour, the sign of the “Red Lion.”

Within this house the discharged men met together, and subtly plotted too, resolving by general consent not to spoil their plans by immature action upon them, but to wait till a certain day, not then far distant, should have passed by, before taking final action in the matter together.

Sadler was not apt to place much trust in human nature generally, and, though a clumsy, inexpert workman, was not destitute of a species of low, idle cunning, which led him, fox-like, to make his observations quietly, and wait patiently for the time when they could best be put to a practical result. Having, after his discharge, nothing else, as he conceived, to do for a time, he amused himself by sauntering listlessly up and down the Lowchester streets, or in lounging meditatively along the banks of the Lowchester river. One day he found himself, in one of his moods of idle observation, very near the row of houses in which lived the man on

whom he had come to look as his enemy, and whom he had determined, if possible, to injure, in exchange for the ill turn done by him to himself. On that especial day there was a great stir going on at the Hardimans.' New furniture of, as it seemed to him, a grand and costly description was in process of arrival thereat, and, under the influence of so unwonted a cause of excitement, the whole strength of the Hardiman household, only excepting its head, were clustered at the door to greet their new possessions. Then Sadler took more energetic whiffs at his pipe, and began to muse. He knew, pretty well, the financial position of the family, and that that was anything but a prosperous one. He knew something about the antecedents of both father and mother, and was convinced that they had no expectations, near or remote, to justify them in the purchase of the polished mahogany chairs, and table, and sofa, that were being conveyed within their domicile. It

amused him, in an ill-natured, sarcastic way, to stand and witness all that was going on. He stood there till, apparently, all the furniture-bringers had departed, and still fixed his eyes on the closed door, as though fascinated. He then walked up and down in front of the house, and watched it from time to time, when, lo ! other treasures arrived there, and again there was perceptible glee and excitement among the family group assembled at the door. Choice took him, the next day, to the same spot, on the same errand. It dawned upon his mind, after a sort of undefined, prophetic fashion, that the Hardimans were going down into hot water, with their eyes open. Such things as those whose arrival he witnessed every day were not to be obtained without a considerable outlay of money, present or prospective, and whence was that money to come ? As he mentally answered that question, he speculated whether it were likely that John and Mary

had come by these goods dishonestly. He knew that the one was a clever mechanical schemer, and that the other was weak and vain enough to dress herself and the children with a smartness unbecoming their station. Mary Hardiman, though the mother of a round family, had still a fine figure, and did the best she could to set it off to full advantage. Further, by degrees, it dawned upon his mind that, not improbably, his own dismissal, and that of his mates, as a consequence of the new mechanical "dodges," might be also a "dodge" whereby Hardiman meant to absorb their united earnings into his own pocket. At this stage of his meditations Sadler took very vehement whiffs at his pipe, and walked about, to and fro, nearer to the house; and that night, when with his companions at the "Red Lion," he communicated to them, privately and confidentially, his notion that they were about to have the whip-hand of their enemy, and that they

would soon have it in their power to prove that he was making dishonest gains at their expense. He advised, however, that they should be sly and cautious in their proceedings for the present. Payment for a large order was expected from America. Sadler himself reminded his mates that he had a brother in the very house—one more fortunate, because more plodding, than himself—in the post of confidential clerk in it, whence the said payment was expected. He would set a trap for Hardiman by writing to that brother. He would learn from him the date when the draft should be posted in America, and he would call upon the tradesmen, by whom the Hardimans had recently been supplied, about the time of its expected arrival in England, and ascertain whether they had been paid, and when the said satisfaction of their claims took place. If their tiger-like watchings, and preparations to spring upon their expected prey, got wind before the time,

their game might altogether be spoiled. Hence the men at the “Red Lion” spoke to each other in whispers, and waited till the wished-for moment should have arrived.

Sadler was wise enough to reflect that if his brother should write to him on the same day when the draft should be despatched, the two letters would be likely to arrive in England together, and felt that nothing definite could well be done before that time.

It has been hinted that the Hardimans’ movements at this time were impulsive and eccentric. That such was the case was due simply to Mary Hardiman’s discovery that their proceedings were watched by the observant Sadler, and to her own counter-machinations, in order to defeat his vigilance. When, by the lurid light of her own consciousness of guilt, she first read, or seemed to read, his purpose, in haunting the immediate neighbourhood of their abode, sorely was her mind disturbed, and her woman’s wit perplexed. For a little

while she resolved to present a bold front to the real or fancied discovery she had made. First, she shot forth against the suspected spy terrible glances, full of insulted dignity. He should be made to feel that he was a mere reptile in her path. She would *look* him down; would shame him off his 'vantage-ground. But in this she failed. Sadler, as she could not fail to see, held on to his purpose with a dogged pertinacity, worthy of a better cause. Then, so soon as she noted that he had come again to his usual place of observation, she angrily drew down the three front blinds, by way of conveying a hint that his presence there was obnoxious to her. But, in spite of this manœuvre on her part, she could see, by peeping slyly round the blind-corners, that the enemy had not moved away from his accustomed beat. Then she owned to her secret self that she felt just a little anxious, and tears flowed—tears that betrayed the sense of being overmatched and outdone,

and none the less bitter because she knew there was no solid consolation at hand to dry them up. At last the bold strategic policy occurred to her of removal, and, for a while, in the excitement of what is known as house-hunting, she forgot their persecutor's pertinacious attitude of espionage. But when the remove had been only half effected—when the new house had been taken, and a portion of the furniture only had been conveyed into it, lo ! Sadler was again to be seen in front of it, and Mary Hardiman, as she scented danger at hand more clearly every day, felt as though a mountain were about to fall in upon her head, and crush her.

The day of triumph for the “Red Lion Cabal” duly arrived. It was that in the afternoon of which Marion Wilmot was driven to Wimperley Grange. Little suspicion had she, when she left her father’s home that day, that disaster of a two-fold nature for him and for her was at hand, that would alter her posi-

tion very greatly in the eyes of a cold, calculating, money-loving world. She had thought, in spite of her father's taciturnity as to his pecuniary affairs, that she would inherit a not inconsiderable fortune at his death. Not that Marion ever speculated on such a point; her love for her father would have prevented this. But it was only natural that as she had allowed in her heart the pleasing day-dream of love and marriage, she should desire to bring to the future partner of her life a moderate dower. And it was because she never allowed herself to speculate as to the probable amount of that dower, because she ignored altogether, as no affair of hers, the occasional interchange of letters between her father and Abel Grindstone, and because she put the very best construction possible on her father's habitual silence respecting his finances, that she settled into a calm state of satisfaction that her position in life, in the event of her father's death happening before her own, would be

one sufficiently above necessity. She little dreamed that the snug little property on which she had drawn her first breath, and which, with other store of wealth, she confidently expected to bring to her husband by-and-bye, would never come into her possession at all. She had never known, till that last night on which her father died, that any mortgage existed on the Poplars; and still less had she suspected that it was one to a very considerable amount. She left the Poplars on that afternoon feeling conscious of the warm, sunny presence of Hope in her heart; she returned to it, to find that this ghostly companion was about to take to itself wings and flee away; threatening, at the same time, to leave a winter within—sanguine as she was in temperament—which she never anticipated.

Mr. Wilmot, towards the close of his life, could neither attend to his letters, calculate the amount of wages due to his workmen, bank his remittances, nor in any other way

enter into business cares. Far better would it have been for him could he have retired from them altogether; but he had passed through one or two great commercial crises of late years, by no means without damage to his prosperity. He was aware that his affairs were involved, that his estate was mortgaged, and he argued himself into the belief that, in such a state of things, there was no alternative between relinquishing business altogether at a most critical time in his financial history, or substituting an old tried servant for himself in the conduct of it, at the lowest possible cost, by which means something might be done towards making good the failures of the past. His very illness prevented him from exercising any control over this servant. He could but trust him implicitly, and as yet had seen no reason to doubt his honesty; but if it had not been that the love of greed was still strong in the nature of the old man, he would have been led by a wise and prudent

forethought, even in his own interest, to take care that his chief and confidential servant was not underpaid for the services he rendered.

But the morning came. The Hardimans were yet in a state of transition from one house to another. Sadler's evil shadow fell much upon the pavement between the two houses, and still more upon John and Mary's hearts. They had discussed his movements much. They repented of what they had done, not so much because of its guilt, as because they were in fear and trembling lest all should be discovered. They had changed their abode, and he had tracked them thither. It was evidently his determination to dog their footsteps closely, as though their own shadows were following them. This was not an agreeable state of things. Moreover, the goods had been ordered and had been received, and the tradesmen who had supplied them must be paid, in order that their feet might not

enter more deeply into the mire, and an open public exposure overwhelm themselves and their family in beggary and ruin. That was a desperate state of things not to be contemplated—one that must be averted at any cost. Should they confess all, and throw themselves on their master's mercy? No. To do that would be to make appeal to an utterly sordid man, who, if, for selfish ends, he retained the husband's services, would take care to re-imburse himself for their robbery of him by materially lessening his wages, and so reducing them to most miserable straits. They were in the depth of these anxious cogitations, when Hardiman went to the works, and found that the American letter and remittance had arrived. Tremblingly he opened it and read. It was in the usual business form, and the draft fell out of the cover through the nervous agitation of the hand that held it. He saw that the letter itself was not written by one of the principals. He held it up to read

between his two thumbs and forefingers. Immediately above these were the words—

“ I am, dear Sir,  
“ Your’s obediently,  
“ *For JOHNSON, GREEN, AND CO.*”

He removed his thumbs from the signature they had covered, and read—

“ MARTIN SADLER.”

His feelings, as he saw that signature, were such as it is by no means easy to describe. For a moment he felt as one stunned and confounded. That name arraigned him at the bar of conscience, and accused him thereat of harbouring an intention to commit a pre-meditated act of theft and treachery, with a force, a persistence that, all voiceless as it was, sent back the blood from his heart, and evoked from him an involuntary cry of pain. And yet he remembered, after a while, that he had read that signature before ; and that,

too, appended to the communications with Mr. Wilmot of the very house in which the bearer of it was a servant. But formerly the name had no particular interest in his eyes, and he had forgotten there was a clerk in that firm called by it, till it stung him with a singular sharpness, in its connexion with the events of the past few days. And then he fingered the draft tremulously, and hated himself as he did so, for the very rustle of the paper in his hands seemed almost to be a voice speaking to him, and luring him on to crime. Was he still intent on the commission of that sin ? If so, as an evil whisperer close to his heart suggested, he must be quick in action. But, on the other hand, he seemed in those terrible moments, as the temptation neared its climax, to be aware of the presence at his ear of another invisible whisperer, and the counsel thus given was that he should “flee as a bird from the snare of the fowler;” that if he played the true man in that hour of

danger, if he took upon himself the consequences of his act of mad folly in incurring debts for which he knew at the time he could not honestly pay, and misappropriated not one single farthing of the money, with the handling of which his master, a hopeless, helpless invalid, had so implicitly trusted him, a way would, by-and-bye, be opened out to him to safety and honour. What practical reply should he give? How should he act under this pressure on him from the two opposite worlds? If he had not been, morally, a coward, he would have acted upon the advice his good angel had given him, and have asked no other person to qualify or supplement it; but he obeyed, instead, the weak, vacillating voice of his own spirit, and went for counsel to one who, just then, was the last person in the world he should have consulted—his wife.

In his passage from the counting-house through the yard to the outer gate, leading

into the street, he almost brushed against one of two workmen who were talking together. As he walked on, one of them looked up into his face, and his countenance fell. It was Sadler.

## CHAPTER IX.

## JOHN HARDIMAN'S CRIME.

SADLER was one of the deep ones of the earth. He wished John Hardiman to think that his presence in the yard of the Lowchester manufactory on the morning when he, as well as the former, had heard from America, was a mere accident. John was not likely to suspect that he, too, had a communication from the same house, which had reference to the draft just received. And Sadler opined

that if he called out a certain harmless old man from the works, and opened a long, desultory conversation with him in the region of the counting-house, he might be able, from time to time, to throw furtive glances through the long, broad window of that apartment, on the figure and movements of the suspected clerk, and thereby, perhaps, gain another point or two a-head of his antagonist, in the cunning and exciting game the two were playing.

Hardiman reached his home that morning feeling much as a spent fox, hotly hunted and closely pressed, would feel, who had succeeded in reaching a covert, only to hear the deep baying of the enemy in the near neighbourhood of his place of retreat. When he entered and left the bank, Sadler was on his track, and it was with the impression that he was still closely followed up, that in a quick, nervous way, and with much trepidation of manner, he closed the street door of his

house, and barred and bolted it, as if against open invasion. He found Mary within, and the two were soon in conference together on the situation in which they found themselves.

And after no long interval of time it became evident to both of them that they could only confess or flee. Even the sharp-witted wife could hit upon no other alternative. And they must decide at once. Confession or flight must be resorted to before sun-down. With all the agitation of conscious but unacknowledged guilt, they hurriedly discussed the *pros* and *cons.* for each alternative. Confession went strongly against the grain of both. Had not John Hardiman's talents added to his master's coffers very materially, while he himself had received neither thanks nor adequate remuneration for their exercise? Was it a thing to be endured that John should humble himself to the dust before the man who had wronged him by neglect, and who, in addition to that, might ruin him for life? Would it

not be better to flee? Could not restitution be made in after years? So it was that the voice of the good angel, who kept on urging "Confess, confess," grew fainter and fainter, till it died away altogether to the inner ears of both husband and wife, owing to the persistency with which the evil angel plied his suggestions, and to the eagerness with which they were listened to.

But now that they were resolved upon the alternative of flight, they must endeavour, if possible, to prevent all chance of pursuit. The dangers by which they saw themselves surrounded for the present, were fewer than they would be in a few hours' time. Had not Sadler followed his enemy closely up? Would he not be likely, in the course of that day, to make everything known? He was the one man they most dreaded. Could nothing be done to check him in his career of persecution? Could nothing be done even to win him over to their cause? His character was

known to be one by no means perfect. It might be a desperate venture, but the pressing urgency of their position admitted of their making desperate ventures only. If in resorting to these they should fail, such a result could add little to the humiliation and disgrace into which, if pursued and arrested, John Hardiman must fall. If, on the other hand, Sadler could be bribed into friendship and complicity by some immediate negotiations, all danger might be averted, and a prosperous issue be attained to.

But where was Sadler to be found ?

Search was made for him, by means of a messenger, in his house. The messenger returned, with the information that Sadler's home and his wife and children, bore on them pitiable tokens of poverty and wretchedness, and that the only woman he had seen in the house had roundly told him she "neither knew nor cared to know where Sadler was ; and

that the people at the 'Red Lion' were the likeliest to know his whereabouts."

Then the same messenger, a boy, unsus-  
picious of the nature of the game in which he  
was called upon to play his part—a factory  
boy, on whose intellects it had not yet dawned  
that anything like conspiracy was brewing in  
the works—posted off, by request, to the  
"Red Lion," and returned with an answer  
to the effect that Sadler and his friends *had*  
been there, but had left an hour or two ago,  
"rather the worse for liquor," to go to Mr.  
Wilmot's.

John Hardiman caught eagerly at this last  
intelligence. If his enemy, at such a juncture  
as this, could not forego his old and well-  
known habits, might he not, by skilful  
management, be got completely into his  
power? The Poplars was at a distance of  
six miles from Lowchester: men under the  
influence of intoxicating liquor would be slow

travellers: there would be time to send off Mary and the children to Liverpool with a large portion of the spoil. With the rest Hardiman could commit himself, in the course of an hour or two, to a course of action that was not without some prospect of success. He resolved to start in pursuit of Sadler and his companions, to take advantage of his well-known proclivities, and, if possible, win him over to his own cause, and prevent further detection and disaster.

The road between Lowchester and the Poplars passes through a lonely and much-neglected district, called Fenny Mead. It is intersected by the river that flows through that part of the country, the bed of which stands on a higher level than the circumjacent meadow lands, so that, in order to render it possible for the country-people to proceed in their conveyances to Lowchester market, it was found necessary to construct an artificial

way of the requisite width, sloping down on either side from the rude wooden bridge that spans the river. About a hundred yards lower down there is a path across the river, by which the distance between some of the country hamlets and the town is somewhat lessened; but this road is not available when, owing to the continued prevalence of wet weather for any considerable length of time, the river overflows its banks, because this path lacks an artificial roadway, without which it is not passable. In this place the water is spanned by two or three planks, laid together side by side. To these planks is now attached a wooden railing, that serves as a protection against falling into the water, but, at the time to which my tale has reference, it had been, by some accident, broken down. Just there the stream is deep and black. You hear distinctly, at this spot, the roar of the mill-wheel that lies a hundred

yards lower down. Away from the edge of the water, on the side of it farthest from Lowchester, and at the end of a long lane, by means of which there is communication between the mill and a little hamlet adjoining, is a public-house, called "The Jolly Fishers." A quaint old weather-beaten sign swings over the door. Through this hamlet lies a road to the Poplars, for anyone who, for the sake of shortening the distance, prefers to diverge from the more direct public road.

John Hardiman, feeling convinced that Sadler and his companions would not take the market-road to the Poplars, on account of its being the longer route, struck into a narrow and deeply-rutted lane, diverging from the more public thoroughfare, about half-a-mile before one reaches the large wooden bridge. It was a comfortless, autumnal afternoon. The air was raw and searching, and an extra darkness brooded over the landscape that consorted ill with the state of

mind in which he walked along. But, when a man is in desperate case, he does not ordinarily allow his spirits to succumb to such influences from without, however comfortless. For some time he feared he had missed the track of the man he was in search of. Since entering on the Fenny Mead he had met only one or two stragglers, returning home from labour, and the contrast he drew between them and himself—humble but plodding and unambitious sons of the soil as they were, as they gave him a cheery good-night in passing—was one by no means favourable to his own condition. Growing impatient at last, he enquired of one of these labourers, if he had met four or five men in company together on the road to Mr. Wilmot's. He was answered in the affirmative. They had been met between Mr. Wilmot's house and the hamlet, in which was the public-house already referred to. They were coming along in the middle of the road, and the countryman said that, as

he passed them, they appeared excited, and not over-steady in their walk, and that he thought they had had “belike a drop too much.” A strange thrill passed through Hardiman’s frame at this rejoinder, and a chill, as of momentary fear, but he pressed his lips together, and braced himself up, and passed on. He noticed, as he crossed the planks, that the hand-rail was broken down, and, at that moment, there shot through his mind an impulse and a presentiment, both of evil origin : the one connecting, in association together, his enemy and the black water below the planks ; the other whispering of peace and security to him who, but a moment before, was conscious only of unrest and danger. If Satan can sometimes present himself in the character of an angel of light, what marvel that, when he would hurry a victim on along the downward path, he should try to impart to his secret communications with the soul in such a case, an outward

look and seeming as much like that of a word from the celestial world as he can manage to convey to it? Better had it been for him if he had never been born, or better had it been for him that that narrow plank-way over the river, and “The Jolly Fishers” in that lonely hamlet had never existed.

The little hamlet was peaceful and still, as Hardiman passed through it. The cotters' doors were shut, and the ruddy light of the home fire shone through the windows. He noticed, as he walked on, the broad shadows of those within, as they moved to and fro in their kitchens; he heard the cheery voices of the housewives, and the prattle of children, and gladly would he then have been the youngest, and the poorest of them all. He had no light weight of gold in his pockets, but the care within his heart was heavier still; and there, he knew, it must henceforth remain, for now to retrace his steps was a thing impossible. Just as he reached the last

house in the hamlet, and was passing from within the reach of its reflected fire-light into a long and dreary country lane, he heard footsteps, as of men approaching, and then their voices, amongst which Sadler's was recognized. He paused a moment—as if to gain breath for a coming conflict—but it was only for a moment. The tones of the men were loud and hearty, even to joviality. He could distinguish, from their heavy, uneven, and clumsy footfalls, that they were coming with unsteady steps; and presently, as they drew nearer, confirmation was given to his suspicions of this, by his perception of the dim figures of the men, reeling from side to side. Most probably they had been served with refreshments by Mr. Wilmot's orders, and had partaken unsparingly of the fare set before them. He decided in a moment what he should say. The state of intoxication in which the men were, gave him, physically and

mentally, great advantage over them, and he was not slow to avail himself of this fact in order to mould their proceedings, to the utmost of his power, into accordance with his will. He stood still, when they were within a few feet of him, and touched one of them on the shoulder.

“ Sadler, a word with you. Let the rest go on.”

The man was fairly thrown off his balance at first by the directness of this *rencontre*, but presently he rallied, and blustered a little, and the rest of the men stood round as well as they could be said to stand—also in defiant attitude.

“ Sadler indeed! Wh—wh—what d’ye want with me? Have at him, boys.”

But each man, conscious that so much effort on his part was a thing impossible, held aloof. Hardiman pressed his opportunity.

“ Play no dangerous game with an armed

man, who has his wits about him," said he. " Sadler, come with me to the hedge-side. I want to speak to you."

Sadler looked up into Hardiman's determined face, and read danger there. He could not resist—his companions would not or could not resist him. What could he do, but yield to the clerk's request? And he did so—not without a sort of vague sense that he might be about to hear from him something to his advantage. The other men stood gaping on.

They withdrew together about fifty yards to a field-gate on the left hand side of the road leading to the Poplars, and leant against it. Then Hardiman spoke, as he held Sadler by the collar of his coat.

" Don't you and your friends be fools, man. You have made me desperate, and now are in my power, every one of you, for you're drunk;—and I am sober, and armed to the teeth, as I can prove if you wish. But I had rather be friends."

“Friends! What d’ye mean? I’ve got a letter in my pocket to Serjeant Timmins, an’ he’ll settle you, I reckon, if I can’t.”

“And I’ve got a thousand pounds in my pocket, and you shall have half of it, on condition you give me that letter.”

“What d’ye say?”

“You shall have five hundred pounds if you’ll give me that letter.”

“Down?”

“Down.”

“D—— it that’s a bargain, Hardiman. I d-d-d-on’t care a —— for old Wilmot: not I. Let him do without it. Count out the money.”

“Not here—it’s too dark;—but give me here your letter, and I will give you a handfull of sovereigns, here at once, and the rest the moment we’re at sea together on the way to the diggings.”

Sadler fumbled in his pockets, and Hardiman simultaneously did the same.

“Here’s the governor’s letter, then, and—honour bright now!—you’ll square up with me for the rest?”

“There’s a proof that I will,” rejoined the other, as he placed a number of sovereigns in Sadler’s hands. “What more would you have?”

Sadler took the coins, and every nerve and fibre in his frame throbbed with excitement. But, bad man as he was, he thought about his companions, and proposed that they should have a share of the spoil.

“But there’ll be the less for you and me, won’t there?”

“Well, what’s to do, then?”

“Keep your counsel. Let’s all have a friendly glass together, to drown old differences in, and then—when they’ve had enough, you know—you and I can give ‘em the slip.”

“All right.”

Men in Sadler’s position are not quick in

their discernment of possible dangers that may result from their actions ; and he, therefore, failed, just then, to foresee that it would be a perilous thing for both to leave three old comrades behind them. What mischief might they not set on foot when once their drunken fit was over ? mischief that might find its way even across the sea—to their confusion.

“ But, Sadler, look here. Let them booze and drink as much as they like. You’ve had a’most enough. You can’t walk steady now. Don’t you be a fool, or we’ll never reach the sea to-night. A glass or two for old acquaintance sake, you know—and just to wet the bargain—and then we’re away.”

The men—not unwillingly—were led to the “ Jolly Fishers ” that night. Mr. Wilmot’s letter to the serjeant was burned. Glass after glass was drunk by all but the two conspirators. Sadler, however, had drunk more than moderately, when the word was given to move. For mere appearance’s sake they

shook the other men ; but all were utterly incapable of stirring.

“ Well, then, let ‘em sleep it off, landlord ; and, hark ye, do you tell ‘em we’re gone, an’ hopes to see ‘em all right at Lowchester to-morrow,” said Sadler, not very distinctly.

“ You’d better wait an’ go altogether,” urged the landlord ; “ I can’t be bothered with drunken men here, keepin’ late hours. I ain’t used to it.”

“ Then send ‘em home in your cart, or put ‘em up for the night in your barn. As for goin’ along of us, look at ‘em—they can’t do it, an’ we can’t stay any longer,” urged Sadler.

Hardiman had his own reasons for allowing the other to be spokesman, as long as he could safely do so.

At last the landlord of the “ Jolly Fishers ” grumpily assented, and Hardiman and Sadler took their way homeward.

They proceeded by the road that would lead them over the plank, which was, as has

been said, the nearest and the most sequestered way to Lowchester. Ill can the tumultuous whirl of passions be described, by which the soul of Hardiman was disturbed, as the two fared on together. He had already gone down hill in crime,—so far that he saw no possibility now of retracing his steps, with honour and respectability. He had no desire whatever for Sadler's complicity with him in his nefarious schemes, any longer than it seemed desirable, and even indispensable to him to have it. The desire to have an accomplice at all was farthest from his thoughts. He could only entertain feelings of the utmost aversion towards Sadler, by whom they had been, in a great measure, frustrated. Within his soul all was dark and graceless: he had commenced to carve out for himself the way to wealth, and to do this had broken loose from the restraints of religion and conscience. The road could not, as it seemed to him, be rendered smooth and easy, unless he hurled

one man for ever out of it. He had done much, and now every step he took he was gaining courage to do more. It was dark overhead, and Sadler, as he staggered on by his companion's side, could not see the demoniacal working of his face. They reached the planks, which a plentiful fall of dead leaves from a single tree close by, and the mud collected by the heavy boots of former passengers from the dirty soil near them, had rendered somewhat slippery. And as Sadler reeled on to this rude wooden pathway, and, to steady himself in his passage across, felt for the rail which, in his drunken fit, he forgot was there no longer, his companion obeyed, on the instant—another suggestion from the Abyss—and rushed violently upon him, and the next moment he was a dead man at the bottom of that dark and fateful stream.

And the murderer was not pursued, for at the Coroner's inquest the jury took into consideration that the deceased and his com-

panion had been drinking, and allowed that his death might possibly have been an accidental one, and that the supposed intoxicated condition of the other, and his possible terror on seeing Sadler fall into the water, might have made him powerless to render assistance. On this account the open verdict was given, "Found Drowned ;" but on Hardiman's conscience, and in The Dread Book of Remembrance that shall be open on the Great Day, when all things that are dark shall be made plain, that deed was characterised and defined in two words of much more awful meaning.

## CHAPTER X.

SHE SAID, "I AM AWEARY, AWEARY."

IT is no light matter to quit a home in which one has first drawn breath after more than twenty years' association with it; the home, every room in which is full to overflowing of sacred memories, haunted still by the feet and by the voices of the loved and the mourned. So Marion Wilmot felt after her father's will had been read, and when she was sufficiently awake from her astonishment at its contents

to realise the sad position in which she was left. She had thought that the house at least would be her own. Every tree, and shrub, and flower in the garden she had gradually come to look upon as if they had been so many mute friends. They had been planted, and watched, and tended under the auspices of a father and mother removed from her side, and could almost have spoken of them to her, had she been permitted still to stay where they were; but it was not so to be. She was a resident by courtesy at the Poplars a little longer; and then, as Eve left her favourite flowers, and walks, and pursuits behind, when she was banished from Paradise, she must go forth, she knew not whither; and leave to be enjoyed by others, the cool shade of the Poplars, and the verandah, with its pretty flowers, and everything else that had made her home warm and delightful to her. Stern necessity required it. The house was now the property of Abel Grindstone. The

furniture must be sold in order to satisfy the claims of creditors. She was under the dark oppressive shadow of a great change, and its coldness and dreariness seemed to have pierced into the very veins of her body, and to have coated them with ice.

There was indeed just one hope left whose brightness and power to support had not departed from her. She could not, while yet she remained at the Poplars, wander about its desolate precincts without thinking tenderly of him who, without wooing, had won her heart there. She still loved to awaken into melody the chords of her pianoforte, remembering, as she did so, that he once stood at her side, and attentively turned over the leaves of her music-book, or accompanied her on his flute or violin. She looked long at the books he had read to her, and especially at his pencil marks traced along the margin by the side of his favourite passages. She thought of him as her footfall fell on the stone floor

of the verandah, or along the garden walks. He had taught her the history of many a flower that bloomed about her childhood's home, and had helped her to tend them ; but out of his discoursings again and again renewed in the old days, there had dropped into her heart a seed whence had grown another flower, and that he tended not ; he recked not of its existence, and she could not tell him it was there. It lived still, but drew its life at the cost of her own vital powers. It lived, though since her father's funeral-day, he had not been near her. But day by day she waited, and dreamed of his coming, pondering much on the words of the wisest of men, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick ; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life."

Good Aunt Edith yet remained with her, and purposed so to do till after the sale had taken place, but the intercourse between them was of the most imperfect kind. For the elder lady had her energies centred on

rubbing up, or cleaning down. She was intent on doing her best to set everything off by the day of sale. She fussed with the servants and examined the linen, and routed in her search for family relics, among the drawers, and employed herself generally on matters so practical, and having for the most part so much reference to the present, that she and Marion saw comparatively little of each other during the daylight hours, and, when they met at night, Miss Wilmot's thoughts and ideas were wide as the poles asunder in their divergence from those of her niece. If ever such a flower had grown in Aunt Edith's heart, it had long since been withered down to the roots, and only the dust of it remained.

One evening, when there began to be a lull in the preparations for the sale, Aunt Edith found a little time for chat with Marion, and appeared to be much exercised in mind respecting an incident that had that day happened during the younger lady's absence with

her friends at Wimperley Grange. Old Mr. Grindstone had called. He had wanted very much to see Marion, and had left in not the best of humours. More than that he had left word that the sale had better be postponed; and when Aunt Edith sought, with womanly tact and curiosity, to worm out of him the whys and wherefores of the case, he had snapped her up with a reply, the depth of whose meaning she had in vain tried to fathom, to the effect that—

“Perhaps the sale needn’t take place at all.”

“There’s something in the wind,” said the old lady; “and what it is I don’t know, and I don’t know either why the old fellow shouldn’t have told me all about it; but get it out of him I couldn’t.”

Marion too herself was puzzled. For be it known that old Mr. Abel Grindstone was by no means one likely to withhold, for any long period of time, his clutch from possessions of

which he had become master ; and why, therefore, he should wish to put off the day of sale at the Poplars, the two ladies could not discover. Such a course was foreign to the habits and instincts of the man. There was that at the Poplars which was capable of being turned into gold for his advantage, and he held aloof from touching it.

Many a poor man had he ruthlessly stripped of his furniture, and sold with what speed he could that “ the uttermost farthing ” might be added to his treasures. He had grown rich by scheming to set his mortgages on houses and lands on terms most advantageous to himself. It was his wont to smile graciously on the simple wight who, with little money, and less brains, would fain build himself a house, or buy a field :—and then lend him money on hard terms and ample security.

In due time the mortgage was pitilessly foreclosed, and the poor victim, whose ambition

to be owner of house or land had carried him out of his depth, found, with embittered heart, that he had enjoyed the shadow or pretence of the coveted distinction, for a time, only to enrich, by his act of folly, the substance of a heartless usurer and a mean-spirited miser. He had not a spark of heaven-born pity in his breast. Generosity and charity were to him words that represented qualities he held in sovereign contempt. Such a man looks on, while widow and orphaned children weep, with unmoved countenance. If they bring him money, let them bring it, and begone. It is nothing to him that the world is one full of weeping and wailing, so long as he can have his own unhindered ease, and selfish joy in it. The first and last thoughts of such creatures—misnamed men—are about money. The bank in which their treasures are deposited, the office in which their lawyer plies his pen, the number of houses they have won—these are to them fairer spectacles than

God's fairest scenes in nature. "Woe unto them that add house to house and field to field" in such unscrupulous ways, "that justify the wicked for reward, and would take away the righteousness of the righteous from him." At the end they shall lie down in sorrow.

"There's something in the wind, Marion, that *I* can't make out. Can *you* give a guess, child, what it is?" repeated the old lady, as, for once in a way, she seated herself restfully in front of the dining-room fire, and nursed her knees thereat, preparatory to a little chat.

"Not *I*, indeed, auntie," replied Marion, looking puzzled.

"What could he want of you, I wonder, that he could not have got from me just as well?"

"Just as well," returned the other, falling, as it were, mechanically, into the repetition of her aunt's words. "Is he coming again?"

“Yes, he’s going to ride over to-morrow ; so you’d better not go out.”

“It’s fortunate I cannot. Priscy Cameron’s coming over to spend the day with us.”

“I’m glad to hear it, child. There’s good sound, common sense in that girl. She’s not one of the every-day sort of young women, who give themselves airs, and think of nothing but dress and flirtation. She’s brains, has Priscilla Cameron.”

“You know she’s going to be married, aunt ?”

“Mary was telling me so while we were clearing out together the other day. To Mr. Pitman, isn’t it ?”

“Yes. He’s a wise man, isn’t he ? He’ll have a treasure in Priscy, and”—looking quizzically—“some money too, you know. Men don’t forget to take that into consideration when they look out for a wife—especially clergymen.”

“And I don’t blame ‘em, child. He’s only a curate, and they’re worse off than day-labourers, that they are.”

“It’s a shame they should be. I can’t understand how it is, aunt, that the Church is so rich, with its great tithes and its little tithes, while so very many of its clergy are so poor. And, by-the-bye, there’s another thing I can’t understand. Why should Mr. Grindstone have the great tithes of St. Mark’s —and Mr. Cameron too, he has great tithes? The clergy ought to have them.”

“I don’t know, child. Things are being turned topsy-turvy altogether. It’s my opinion the whole world’s in a cranky condition, and can’t last much longer; but never mind that, I want now to have some chat with you about your own affairs. What’s to become of you, when you leave here?”

“I am to stay with the Camerons till Priscy is married,” returned Marion, wearily.

“H’m! Yes, and then—”

"Oh, I don't know, aunt, what is to become of me after that."

And as Marion spoke these words, her thoughts wandered away—they *would* do it—to Philip Harvey, and she sighed somewhat heavily.

Why was it that Aunt Edith, too, should have been thinking of Philip Harvey? Very strange are these meetings and flashings together of thought, in one and the same moment of time! Surely good Bishop Ken must have had this electric interchange of unspoken ideas in his mind, when he wrote—

"Let Thy blest spirits while I sleep  
Around my bed their vigils keep,  
Their love angelical instil,  
Guard every avenue of ill:  
Let them their Maker's praise rehearse  
And *thought to thought with me converse.*"

She thought of him, but, as a kind, wise woman, did not speak of him to her niece, nor communicate to her the information, that she had seen him pass by the Poplars the day before with only a look up at the house.

Once Aunt Edith's opinion had been that of the rest of Marion's friends—that she was probably on the way to become his wife, but she had noticed of late that he had not called—even to say that he was sorry for Marion's loss, and the old lady had her own notion about this, which she judged it best to keep to herself.

It will have been seen already that Philip Harvey was given very much more to sentiment than to feeling. In all things he was cautious, cold, calculating. Such men do not love. If they marry, they do so with little if any regard to the poetry of the thing. They treat marriage as purely a matter of respectability and arithmetic. There is in such a case no outwelling of affection, no self-devotion to the happiness of another—all is done for sake of self. Such men, even when none can lay to their charge any offence against moral propriety, are by no means calculated to promote the happiness of women, whose love is

warm and earnest. But, in proportion to the extent of their natural, or acquired gifts, they may exercise an influence over the hearts of our fair friends, of fervid temperaments, which may bring with it a life-long sting. Philip Harvey *prosed* to Marion Wilmot of poetry, and flowers, and music. He was not without some refinement in his tastes and pursuits ; he felt the attractions of her society, and gave himself up to their influence, in a mood of intense, unqualified selfishness and self-love. He possessed insinuating manners, honeyed speech, some amount of mental culture, and was attracted by, while he did not love her. Marion, meanwhile, credited him with a desire to win her for himself, gave herself to his society, and patiently awaited day by day an avowal that had never come yet.

But, now that her last earthly stay had been stricken down, he would surely come ; and who would be so welcome as he ? Or was it possible, could it be, that even he, after hav-

ing manifested in her an interest which she could not but look upon as a sign of genuine, unequivocal affection, was about to withdraw from her, because of his disappointment as to her financial position? Was it on that account that he had not yet called since her father's death? No, surely he would soon return. And so she wearily waited.

## CHAPTER XI.

ABEL GRINDSTONE RESOLVES ON A NEW LEASE  
OF LIFE.

It was early morning ; the sulky matin prime of a damp, foggy, unwholesome day. The mist hung, as it were fairy net-work, over the few trees, and the hedge that formed the enclosing fence of the small, ill-kept garden at Icicle Lodge. The air was pulseless and still, for busy life was not yet astir in that neighbourhood. You heard the cock crow, indeed,

at distant intervals of time, but the sound seemed to have an unnatural cadence in it. The notes were short, husky, and ill sustained, as if the bird were only dreaming of the dawn.

If on that damp, winter morning you had passed at a certain moment the swing-gate that leads into the garden of Icicle Lodge, and had looked up at the house, you would have noticed probably that someone from within was twitching away the blind from the corner of the window, and was peering out. And, if you had been on the other side of that blind, you would have known that Abel Grindstone was that person. It is necessary that even unscrupulous usurers should sleep, in order that they may carry on, with any hope of attaining to old age, the work wherewith Satan has entrusted them. But Abel Grindstone slept lightly, and rose early. It may be gravely doubted whether it was to his credit, or discredit, that he did so. Possibly it would

have been better for society, so far as his own single individual life was concerned, if he had not risen at all. It may be hard to say so, but hard sayings are on that account none the less true. On that morning Abel rose sooner than usual, and proceeded down stairs to his morning devotions. He shivered perceptibly, as he reached the lowest step in his downward descent, and took down from its peg an old overcoat, worn thread-bare, and the one tall old hat which had sufficed for him while years not a few had rolled over it. The coat he buttoned up to his chin, the hat he pressed firmly down upon his head, before he entered a little room, on the left-hand side of the entrance hall, as you approached it by the front door. The door was carefully locked, but yielded to a key which he took from the breast-pocket of his under-coat. Then there faced him the discomforts of a dark room, and a fireless grate, and he shivered again. His first step was to unfasten the shutters, and,

as he did so, the misty light struggled in through a yellow blind of doubtful age, which appeared to have formed no very extensive acquaintance with soap and water, upon a sallow, wrinkled face, and disclosed to view an unpolished Pembroke table, on which lay not a little dust, a heap or two of papers tied together with red tape, and one or two manuscript books. Having again shivered at sight of the colourless grate, he sat down with his back to it, in a chair drawn close to the table, and was soon absorbed in earnest study of the books and papers before him. Almost everything in the room looked old and worn, as he was himself. The table creaked as he lightly touched it, the chairs had been severely battered by time, and were unquestionably on their last legs. The carpet was thin, dusty, in holes, and of an invisible pattern. This room was his own sanctum—the peculiar apartment in Icicle Lodge which he had dedicated to the service of his God—the chapel

of Mammon. His housekeeper could never enter it in his absence ; hence its untidy aspect, hence the odour suggestive of mice and neglect, and the sacred dust. And when Abel sat down in it, a little shrivelled-up old man, with grey, greedy eyes fixed upon his parchments and books, the picture was complete in its parts, and harmonious in its combinations.

But on this said morning the worshipper was presently disturbed. He had been heard to descend the stairs by his housekeeper, a little old woman, whom he had picked up in some forlorn situation or other, in his travel through life, and who had now honoured him by remaining under shelter of his roof not a few years. Her thin, spare figure, sharp contour of countenance, and bleak-looking eyes, offered, in themselves, no very satisfactory testimonial as to the existence either of easy living, or good fare, in the house which was at once her home and her prison.

Rachel Skinner was the sole relict of a family circle that had long since been broken up. Her sky was darkened, and she was alone upon the earth, when old Abel found her—on the brink of starvation—and offered to her the post of housekeeper at Icicle Lodge, on terms which only a poor old, useless, desolate creature would be likely to accept. The two lived hard. Farm produce they might have had in abundance, but old Abel preferred to turn it into money, rather than enrich with it the watery blood of Rachel and himself. His nephews did not live with him; they had notions about better living with which he did not agree; and he was glad to find for them a house on one of his farms, where they could indulge in their extravagances of diet, without his being grieved at the sight of their better-furnished table.

Poor Rachel was condemned to spend almost the whole of her earnings in payment of her doctor's bills, and in order to obtain

the extra fare, which that gentleman prescribed for her, when life was low. Abel Grindstone's wine cellar was empty, and he believed in no species of malt liquor, so that when Rachel was ordered to take wine, beer, or nourishing diet, she had to buy these out of her own stores. He had taken her in, and put into her hands the means of earning an honest livelihood. He was not the most impressionable of men, and seemed to regard as rogues, those who made raid, whether to a large or small extent, on his darling money. Rachel had her own notions of independence. Her master had saved her from the depressing prospect of dying on a workhouse bed. She was thankful, every day of her life, for that. A gentle, patient creature, partly by nature, and partly through ill-health, and hard living, she never thwarted his will, or wantonly gave him trouble, but studied to anticipate his wishes, to the utmost of her power. And after having been in his house all those years,

and studied all his comforts, and humoured all his moods, and borne meekly the brunt of his ill tempers, she may surely be forgiven for two fancies she had in her head—the one that he had some sort of a kindly liking for, and interest in, her ; the other that his home was to be her sanctuary from the world's pelting storms till her death, which often appeared to her doctor and herself not far distant. But in that little, neglected room, in that chapel sacred to Mammon, she heard from his thin, bloodless lips, on that cold, raw morning, words that seemed to send the blood rushing from her extremities, through her swollen heart, like a torrent.

The old man heard the sound of the door opening, and looked up.

“ Oh, it's you, is it ; well, what d'ye want now ? ”

“ Won't you please to have a fire, sir ? ”

“ Yes, light it quick and be gone ; I'm going out to-day early, and want to be alone.

Bring me some breakfast in here, will you? Better light this fire, and put your kettle on here."

"Yes, sir."

Then Rachel went out for kindling materials, and, as she did so, the old man wheeled his chair round, away from the table, as if with the intention of watching her at her work.

Presently she returned, raked out the dusty white ashes, placed in their room shavings, and chips, and a few small nuts of coal, set them alight, and was going away with a meek, weak-minded smile upon her face, as of one who felt she had done her duty, and tried to make her master comfortable.

"Stop a minute. Look here. I sha'n't want you any more, I dare say. You can leave in a week or two, can't you?"

"Leave, sir? Leave? For good d'ye mean?"

"For good? Aye, or for bad, if it is to be so. I can't help what may happen to you."

Tears stood glistening in the old woman's eyes, but her habitual meekness of demeanour forsook her not. She looked into his face—a mute, sorrowful look of appeal. Cold eyes and a rigid, stern, unbending face met her gaze.

“Come, now, no scene, Rachel. Take things as you find them in this world. That's my rule through life, and must be yours too.”

Only a selfish, heartless being, unworthy of the name of man, could have uttered such words to one broken down in health, worn thin by penury, hard work, and hard fare, tottering on the verge of the grave—and a woman.

“I'm sh—sh—sh—ure you've been very good to me, sir. You tuk me in when nothin' but the workus stared me in the face!” said Rachel, at last, finding an outlet for her pent-up feelings in speech.

Was she, then, insinuating that Abel Grindstone could have so lowered himself in his

own estimation as to have been capable of an action that had the least show of generosity in it? He repelled the notion with indignation.

“Pooh! it was a matter of business,” he answered. “I wanted you when you were younger, and you wanted a home. That’s about it, isn’t it?”

“We can’t allays be young, sir,” returned the old woman, with a confirmatory shake of the head, as she applied the corner of her apron to her eyes.

“I know that as well as you do, more’s the pity!”

“And money’s o’ no good in the next world, bless God for it!” said Rachel, with something very like a vixenish expression of countenance.

“Ah, woman, when you and I reach the next world, if there is such a place, we shall see how they manage there. They’re no better than thieves, that would frighten your

money out o' your pocket, by talking about the next world. You won't come over me with such stuff as that, I can tell you."

" You'll have a job, sir, to get a younger woman to do for you what I've done, for as little wage," said Rachel, returning to the charge, " or, if you do, there's them, mebbe, as mightn't be so honest as what I've been."

" Fool ! have you ever been able to lay hand on coin, or valuables of mine ? Honesty i'faith ! that's one o' your Bible virtues, I suppose, ain't it ?"

" Then I'm to prepare for the workus ?" returned Rachel, putting her *bête noir* to her master interrogatively.

" Go where you like ! That's no affair of mine !"

" I'd sooner ha' died first !"

" Died first, eh ? Then you're more in love with death than most folks, I take it. But I've no more time to spare now."

" You couldn't recommend me to anybody

to fettle up and do for, or keep me for less wage?"

"H'm, how much less? But no, that won't do. No, you must go to the workhouse. There, now go, there's a good woman, I'm busy."

And she went. Abel Grindstone was sensible that the infirmities of old age were increasing upon him. His eyes were growing dimmer every day. Much did they ache, beneath the strong magnifying glasses of the spectacles he used, in the hope of aiding their failing powers of vision, but little, indeed, were they benefitted thereby. Nerve and sinew too were both giving way. He seldom slept a calm sleep. He counted all the world his foes. In his dreams, they hungered for his money, tried, in crowds, to force open his doors and safes, or waylaid him with intent to do him some grievous bodily harm. In fact, his nights were becoming a horror to him, and he hated their deepening shadows.

He had always a dim light burning in his bedroom. It was the one of three evils which he had chosen to put up with, in order that he might sleep at all. In perfect darkness his fears kept him awake, and too much light produced upon him the same effect. He was growing uneasy, and distrustful of his condition. He hungered, a little, for human love, and pondered with himself whether he should sacrifice a little of his money, in order to obtain it. The recording angel well knew that, from time to time, he was haunted by no very pleasant or encouraging thoughts and fancies, as to that foe of mankind, and, especially, of the usurious among them, whom, by hook or crook, he had contrived to keep at bay, for more than seventy years. Once he had tried to live as though possessed by the notion that the great foe had forgotten him. And now that his mortgages were daily increasing, and his vast capital was accumulating in various ways, he felt espe-

cially annoyed by the discovery, that the said relentless foe was giving signs of drawing nearer. Must it be so? Could he not, by some means or other, shake off the enemy's grip? Was there nothing to give him that strength and energy by day, of which time had robbed him; nothing to quicken the slow pulse, or to kindle something like warmth in the aged frame at night? Warm cordials and thick blankets he had tried, and found unavailing. The mind was vigorous, but it had an unmanageable servant to control, in the shape of its poor worn consort, the body. Cordial and warmth he must have of another kind, if he would last out the year, and this, as a last struggle for dear life, to be spent in the cherishing, for its own sake, of dear gold, he would now strain after; and he was the earlier up that morning, in order to devise means for the accomplishing of his purpose.

As will already have been guessed, the old man meditated marriage. He held that the

fidelity, and the constancy, and the warmth, which even he had witnessed sometimes in others, united to each other by the matrimonial tie, could be made a matter of purchase and sale. A young wife would help to cherish him in his chills, and soothe him in his fears, and would be kind to him in his feebleness. And he flattered himself he had that which would secure for him the best choice, among the world of women. It was after he had determined to mend matters, that were really getting serious, in this way, that he resolved upon the dismissal of his old housekeeper. She could tell tales about his habits of parsimony in food and raiment, which it was especially desirable no wife should know. Hence, he resolved on the ruthless sacrifice of her to his matrimonial project, and he arrived at such a resolution with mighty little trouble, for he had no heart to bear upon the case—that was altogether with his gold.

This old man had fixed his choice on Marion Wilmot. He knew that his nephew, Philip, had often visited at the Poplars during her father's lifetime, but ridiculed the notion that love took him thither. And, moreover, if he had chosen to have Marion Wilmot to wife, should that lath of a boy stand in his way? No; if he had even intended to ask Marion to share life with him, he had never, in the least degree, enlightened his uncle's mind on that point. And he had devised another matrimonial project for Philip, in order to get him out of his way, of which more will be said in another chapter.

He was in the act of studying his books and papers—looking, as it were, on the height and breadth, and circumference of his mound of sovereigns, before making up his mind how little he could pare away from the heap in order to effect his contemplated purchase

—when a loud double knock at the hall door announced the arrival of the postman, and he bustled out to receive his letters, as one who lived in constant dread lest his housekeeper should secure them first.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A SHORT CHAPTER FULL OF LETTERS.

ABEL GRINDSTONE meditated, in all gravity and sincerity, the act of taking unto himself a wife, and, on this day, he had risen at an hour earlier than usual, with the intention first of fully making up his mind what price he should offer for the convenience he sought, and, that decided, of riding over to the Poplars to make his offer. This was the day on which he was expected by Aunt Edith. But

all the wealth of the Indies cannot control the weather, and the mist and darkness that shrouded the path between Icicle Lodge and the Poplars, intensified and aggravated from time to time by driving sleet that rattled against the windows, and filled him with anxious fears, lest the mercenary services of a glazier should have to be called into requisition, so far damped the aspiring benedict's ardour, that he resolved to delay his expedition till a sunnier heaven should smile upon it. The postman's cheeks were red and wet with the cold rain that had pelted them, and he looked into Abel's face, as he placed the letters in his hand, with an expression that might have said—if translated into speech—“ If I were in your shoes, old fellow, blest if I'd be what I am!” So the old man went gloomily back into his sanctum, and the old horse abode for that day at his manger, low and disconsolate, over his habitually poor fare. A cab might have been had in Lowchester,

but Abel forebore to send for one, as if dreading lest he should dream in the night of being choked to death, by the shilling he must have spent upon it.

“ It never rains, but it pours.” Abel’s letters were unsatisfactory to him that morning, as was plainly to be seen by the expression of his countenance, and the store of interjections jerked out from his lips during the perusal of them. The exterior of one he examined somewhat quizzically. It was an oblong envelope, and the address was written in a lady’s hand. The paper, moreover, after a most un-commercial fashion, was thickly wove and scented. The enclosure ran as follows:—

“ The Shrubbery, Lowchester.

“ DEAR SIR,—

“ I am desired by my husband, Dr. Buchanan, to mention that he did himself the pleasure of calling upon you, a day or two

ago, during, as it appeared, your absence from home, with the view of endeavouring to interest your kindly sympathy on behalf of the Rev. T. Nichols, Perpetual Curate of St. Mark's. You are doubtless aware that he has long been under my husband's hands ("H'm, that's the reason he don't get well."—A. G.), and that he is in a most precarious state of health. He is suffering from over-work, and over-anxiety of mind, springing from his populous parish, in the charge of which he has no curate to assist him, and from the strain upon him, which must be the natural consequence of his large family. ("Well, what on earth did he marry for?"—A. G.) My husband says that unless he can be relieved of his charge for the time, and sent away from home, his life must be forfeited. In order that he may leave for six months' entire rest, it will be necessary that a sum of money should be raised, sufficient to secure for him the services of a curate, and to help him to pay the expenses of a sojourn away from home. My

husband felt that, as a consequence of your being lay impropriator of the great tithes of St. Mark's, and being, moreover, blessed with large means, you would probably think it a luxury to give in such a case. I need not refer to Mr. Nichols's good name and reputation, and to his zeal for his work in better days,—for this you must be aware of. My husband would again have called, but for his compulsory absence just now in town, and hence he asked me to write for him—I hope not ineffectually.

“ Believe me, dear sir,

“ Yours faithfully,

“ SARAH BUCHANAN.

“ Abel Grindstone, Esq.”

There are certain times, during which surely the Lord of Unreason has sway over us, when we are prone to look upon the postman as our natural enemy. This happens when he brings us documents wherein are contained enticing prospectuses of enterprises by means of which

we are assured that we may quickly double our capital, when we have large families, and no capital whatever to invest for their benefit. Or it happens when we have been struggling, in an honourable way, to obtain money urgently needed ; and, instead thereof, meet with disappointment, and undue, unchristian pressure from those whom we have done our utmost to pay. Abel Grindstone's face, could a photograph of it have been taken, during his perusal of Mrs. Buchanan's letter, and have been submitted to his inspection, would assuredly have been a "caution" to him. The reader shall hear some few of his comments thereupon, and by that means he will gain some idea as to his physiognomy.

He looked on such a letter as an act of insult to him ; as an offence never to be forgiven. That he should be asked for money —money which every one must feel it was the one darling object of his life to drain out of the pockets of others, by means fair and foul, and lay up in shining heaps at his banker's

—was an instance of astonishing impudence which he could find no words to characterize.

“ What on earth have I to do with old Nichols, or he with me? I don’t go to his church, or hear his cant. What if he is so badly off, it’s no fault of mine. He should have been better off. ‘ Suffering from over-work and over-anxiety,’ is he? Pooh! I don’t believe it—not a word of it. What work have parsons to do, I should like to know? What right have they to turn mendicants? ‘ His life must be forfeited?’ must it? Pooh! Buchanan’s only croaking. Besides, what if it is to be forfeited? what is to be will be, I suppose, and it’s no fault of mine. Don’t blame me for it. ‘ Six months’ entire rest,’ eh? Why parsons are always resting, ain’t they? They don’t preach their own sermons, never do any more than they can help, and live away from their people half their time. ‘ Lay Impropiator!’ so I am, but that’s nothing to do with the matter. When I bought the great tithes I didn’t saddle myself with

the duty of keeping Nichols, and his brats from the workhouse. ‘Good name and reputation,’ has he? Humph! that’s because he’s never been found out. No; not a penny! Let me come across Dr. or Mrs. Buchanan, and I’ll give them a bit of my mind, for bothering me in this way.”

And then he threw the lady’s appeal into the fire.

But even Abel Grindstone was not quite such a bear as to think of leaving a lady’s letter unanswered, so after puckering up his lips a little while, and knitting his brows, and trying to feel himself an aggrieved individual, he scribbled off the following reply:—

“Icicle Lodge.

“MADAM,—

“I’m sorry you should have troubled yourself to write to me about Mr. Nichols. I don’t know much of him, and have nothing to do with his affairs. You say I am rich, but if all the clergy who marry,

and get into trouble, are to come to me for help, I should soon be poor enough. You must pardon me for saying I cannot send you any money for him.

“Yours, &c.,

“ABEL GRINDSTONE.”

And so there was an end to that matter. What was the next letter about? Would that please its recipient better? Let us see.

“Bridge End, near Lowchester.

“SIR,—

“Six months ago I was bound for my friend, Mr. John Smith. He was honest but unfortunate. If he had lived, he would have paid you the money you lent him himself, but as you know he is dead, and his widow is left very badly off. I write to you in consequence of a letter I’ve had from your lawyer, Mr. Badger, about this business. I don’t want to shirk my word, but it isn’t very convenient for me just now to pay up, as

I've many calls upon me, and as I did a generous action by Smith, I hope you'll give me time.

“Yours truly,

“THOMAS WRIGHTSON.”

“Time, eh? Wouldn't he like it? If he was such a fool as to be bound for a man, let him rue it. Generous! Bah! No, Badger shall deal with him.”

So Mr. Thomas Wrightson he answered not.

Another letter—and another he opened, but as they have no special bearing on this story, I will not specify their contents. Then he took up the last missive and examined the exterior curiously. The *toute ensemble* pleased him, and he proceeded to open and read—

“Lowborough Hall,

“18—

“SIR,—

“I am informed by my steward that you have a mortgage on ‘the Poplars,’ and that the property is likely to fall into your

hands. Wishing to increase my house property, and having taken a fancy to the estate in question, I should be glad if, in the event of your wishing to sell, you will give me the first opportunity of buying.

“Yours faithfully,

“HENRY ASHTON.

“Abel Grindstone, Esq.”

Mr. Ashton, of Lowborough Hall, was a gentleman whose reputation, as a man of wealth and influence, stood high in the next county to that in which the Poplars is situated. Abel Grindstone knew that he had a daughter, who was likely to possess by-and-bye the great virtue of being immensely rich. It was perfectly true that the Poplars had fallen to him, and, in this case, he saw at a glance, that he had only to put his own price on the estate, in order to get it sold, and off his hands. In a moment or two his decision was made. He would take the train on an early day and visit Mr. Ashton’s residence, after having previously written to secure an

interview with that gentleman. And then it struck him that so good a prospect should be mentioned to Badger, without loss of time. The rain still pelted against the window, and, without, every prospect wore a chilly and cheerless appearance, but within his heart Abel Grindstone felt a flush of joy—a joy that made him rise superior to the depressing influence of the weather.

But as, for a moment, before putting on his hat, he glanced at the table on which lay his letter to Mrs. Buchanan he was reminded by it that having for that day made a “rather particular appointment” with another lady, it was only right he should inform her as to the circumstances by which he was prevented from fulfilling it. So he took up his pen, and briefly wrote—

“ Icicle Lodge.

“ MADAM,—

“ I wanted very much to see you to-day, but cannot reach you on account of

the weather. It is necessary, however, that I should see you without the least loss of time, so that, even if the rain continues, I shall call upon you to-morrow. Now that your father is dead I think you should have someone to take care of you : and, if you've no objection to the arrangement, I will be your husband, if you are content to have it so, and we can only come to terms. So no more at present from

“Yours obediently,

“ABEL GRINDSTONE.”

These were moments of flurry and agitation for the old man. With “the swift glance of the mind,” he was already in the precincts of Lowborough Hall, and with Mr. Ashton and his lawyer. The cheque wherewith the Poplars was to be purchased could surely be at no great distance from his greedy, though aged fingers. In a hurry to be with Badger, he seized the letters he had written, pushed them into envelopes, and took them to the post, little imagining that he was, at the time,

on the brink of furnishing in his own experience a striking illustration of the profound truth conveyed in the trite old adage—"The more haste the less speed."

## CHAPTER XIII.

ABEL GRINDSTONE GOES "A COURTING."

"AND so neither you nor Miss Wilmot can make out what old Grindstone wants with you, Marion?" asked Priscilla Cameron of her friend on the morning of the day after that which is referred to in the last chapter.

They were strolling together at ease in the small but well-laid out garden at the Poplars, in order to whet their appetite for breakfast. Every vestige of the mist and

gloom of the day before had cleared off from the sky, and a fresh, bracing air was abroad—cool without being cold—and pleasantly soft to the touch—the kind of air whose every draught it is a luxury to inhale: which breathes of coming fruit and flower, and ushers the pale snowdrop into life, and fans the dark brown hedgerows into leaf and blossom.

“Not I, indeed, Priscy; but from your saucy look you would have us think you know more than we do: in fact, all about it.”

“You really continue to assure me that you can divine no reason why Miss Wilmot would not do for him, and you would?”

“How you talk, you silly child!” returned Marion, with just a perceptible toss of the head, and a flash from her eyes that betokened here sense of, and disdain for, what appeared to her to be immeasurably absurd.

“Ah, I see, it’s dawned on your poor, slow-

witted mind at last! What a wonder you shouldn't have found it out before."

"Pooh, Priscilla, I can't really let you talk of anything so preposterously absurd," returned Marion, while still an expressive flush of indignation lingered on her face that seemed to betray a consciousness that the case might stand as her friend represented it.

"Don't you see, Minnie, these old fellows, when, as papa would put it, they make asses of themselves in their old age, never choose to mate with those who are best fitted for them. They must have the young, or none at all. Now I say it's a great shame. Old ladies ought to have a chance, and if I were you, I should suggest to him his obvious duty in such a case—I should indeed. Of course, my dear, *you* won't consent to be Mrs. Abel?"

Marion did not speak, but if Mr. Abel Grindstone could have seen her *look* at that moment he would, as to his matrimonial project, have assuredly acted on the terse old

proverb—"A still tongue makes a wise head."

Hours afterwards, in the afternoon, Abel Grindstone, on his old white horse, might have been met in the lanes between his home and the Poplars. A slow, placid jog-trot was all that the infirmities of both man and beast could bear. The spirit and constitution of the old horse had been injured, past all hope of recovery, by low diet, and the master, whenever he dismounted, felt as though several of his bones had been dislodged from their sockets by the exercise. An object of compassion to heaven and earth, and of ridicule to the last was Abel Grindstone, usurer and miser, as he rode along that day—a man with the stamp of settled misery and unrest upon his features, whose heart was dead—withered within him by the selfishness that had been the one rule of his long, sordid life. And now when death stared him in the face he was playing the despicable part of an old beau,

seeking for grace and favour in the eyes of the young and lovely, and deceiving himself into the notion that thus the failing fire might burn up again, and yet a little longer time be given him for devotion to his darling gold. He, called a man, a creature made originally after God's image and likeness, a being destined to be immortal, when the wretched gold he had struggled for so long, and to clutch which he had been ruthless and cruel to men, women, and children, shall have passed away for millions of years, was literally in love with dust. He had preferred it to the interests of the soul. He had grown old and grey and decrepid, grovelling in the mire, hugging it to his heart, content to forego heaven, and to brave the chance of a place of torment, that his degrading passion might be satiated. And this was the so-called man who would fain be one, during the miserable remnant of time that yet remained to him, with Marion Wilmot.

I will not attempt to describe how he felt when he at last entered the grounds lately added to his treasures, conscious that he was on the brink of a declaration which, whether accepted or rejected, could only win for him contempt, and at best a mercenary servitude. Only those who have withered hearts and narrowed aims akin to his can be supposed capable of such a description. Suffice it to say that he fastened his aged animal to the gate, announced himself, and was ushered into the presence of the object of his visit.

Marion Wilmot looked very lovely in her mourning costume, with bright, clean, fresh, unwrinkled face full of the rich eloquent blood of youth, and as the two confronted each other, she tall, and elegant, and he diminutive and trembling, and bowed in form and pinched in face, you would have thought it likely that the meaner creature would rather have sunk into the ground or melted into invisible air than open his mouth in an insulting proposal

of marriage. But, then, life was very precious to that meaner individual *because* of his gold, and what he had come to do must be done.

Marion, in her respect for old age, actually condescended so far as to place near the fire the softest easy chair in the room, and bid her visitor be seated in it. But if Abel Grindstone regarded that as a propitious beginning for him, he altered his mind presently. The lady opened the interview. Seemed, indeed, a little impatient to do so.

“I’m glad you’ve called, sir. It will be a means of setting right a difficulty. I’ve had this morning a very strange letter from you. I am at a loss to imagine what can have led to its being written.”

Abel Grindstone coughed nervously, and shifted his position a little. She was bringing on the crisis more rapidly than he had anticipated.

“You see—my dear—your father is dead—and—as you know, unluckily, things are not

so prosperous for you as you hoped they would be—”

Here Abel halted.

“Of that I am quite aware ; but this letter in my hand, and which is signed by your name, has no reference whatever to my poor dear father — does not even mention his name.”

“N—no !” gasped Abel Grindstone. “God bless me ! what d’ye mean ?”

“It is possible, of course, that you may never have written it at all. I confess I should be only too glad to learn from the character of its contents that it is an impudent forgery, but then I am puzzled to think what inducement there could be to such a forgery.”

“I—I—don’t understand you,” said Abel, looking rather white, and feeling more than rather nervous, for the truth is he *did* understand perfectly. He saw in a moment that, in the flurry caused by the receipt of Mr.

Ashton's communication, he had put his letters into the wrong envelopes, the upshot of which was that Marion Wilmot received his angry refusal to send help to Mr. Nichols, and Mrs. Buchanan was favoured by his offer of marriage.

Marion Wilmot was high-souled and generous in disposition, so that the old usurer stood just then in no very enviable position. He could recover himself, from the thoroughly discomposing effects of the discovery that had dawned upon him, just sufficiently to explain that he had been writing two letters, and had placed, or rather misplaced, them in wrong envelopes.

“ Ah, I see, I see. Then it is plain that the other person to whom you wrote has the letter you intended for me, and I have hers. You must pardon me for one thing. Of course I could not be expected to learn by inspiration that you had made such a mistake, and I read it through, seeing your name at

the end of it, and not knowing but that it might refer to my poor father's affairs."

Abel Grindstone looked very twitchy about the lips, and decidedly uncomfortable about the face. His was a hard, stone-like expression, but, just then, I think some sign or token of the existence of a conscience must have faintly glimmered through.

"Your object in calling on me the other day may, I suppose, have some reference to his affairs," suggested Marion, with a searching look, from whose fire, and directness of aim, the old man flinched not a little.

"No—o; I think not. All has been settled justly, my dear; properly and justly," returned Abel, with not a little hesitation and uneasiness, coupled with an odious hypocritical fawning manner, peculiar to him when it served his turn to be specially gracious.

"My father was very taciturn about his affairs," pursued Marion; "and was so ill that I wanted to trouble him as little as

possible about the concerns of this world ; but I may tell you, Mr. Grindstone, that my friend and lawyer, Mr. Wright, is by no means satisfied with the turn affairs have taken—by no means.”

“ Hadn’t the lawyers better settle those matters, my dear ? You and I, you know, can’t go into them,” replied the visitor, feeling as he spoke an unpleasant doubt as to where he was just then ; and a strange sensation that can only be compared to what a man might be supposed to undergo, who, mentally and morally, was being turned inside out, and having his inmost heart read to the full. Not a pleasant operation for the best of men, still less so for Mr. Abel Grindstone.

“ I know, of course, that my father suffered, and consequently I suffer through the defalcations of that wretched man Hardiman—”

“ Yes—yes—yes ; a bad fellow that, a very bad fellow !” interrupted Abel, with a sudden accession of spirit and energy.

Human nature is not above trying to divert attention, unpleasantly fixed upon oneself, to the criminality of another.

Marion shot a glance at him, as he spoke, that fairly unmanned him again ; but said nothing.

“ You are come to fix the day of sale, Mr. Grindstone ? It has been very long delayed.”

“ No ; I—I didn’t quite come about that—no, not quite. No, I—”

And here Mr. Grindstone was afflicted by a sudden stoppage of ideas.

“ Then may I ask,” enquired Marion, majestically, “ to what I owe the—to what I am to attribute this call ?”

“ Well, no ; I think not. No. Let me see what it was I had to say ? I really forget. But as to the sale it may as well go on. I don’t see why it shouldn’t.”

“ Then if you will favour me by mentioning the day, I will take care that your wishes

are fulfilled to the letter. Can I offer you anything?"

No. He had proceeded thither to bid the queenly creature before him *mention the day*, to make an offer to her; but, instead of this, she had fairly overawed and stupefied him. And now the interview was at an end, and he must return on his slowly trotting quadruped homeward, in disappointment and dejection, a being unloved, and uncared for. Not a happy position to be in, as, in his secret soul, he owned to himself during his progress home. But if the world disliked and shunned him, he could pay it back in its own coin. He could still love his money. He could love and fondle that, as though it were a thing of life, which had come to his dingy home from the encumbered estate, and the ruined house, to bless him above all his neighbours. He could still lock his doors, and read his deeds, and count and re-count his money, and spite the human creation generally, by guarding his

darling sovereigns and bank-notes—as a shepherd would guard his lambs from the wolf—from their invasive touch. And he would make another desperate effort to enter, as it were, into a truce with death. There were other women in the world besides Marion Wilmot; women who were as young, and whom he could hope to bend to his will. On the whole, he felt able to congratulate himself that he had escaped her.

He laid the flattering unction to his soul that if he had spoken to her of marriage she would eagerly have come to terms with him; and that the issue would have been a life of briefer duration than otherwise might have fallen to his share.

When about half way back to his home he was seized by an unlucky desire to visit the Littledale Farm. Well would it have been, as will appear in the sequel, if he had determined otherwise; for, at this time of the year, the darkness came on speedily, and the moon

was on the wane. In order, too, to reach the property, he would be obliged to leave the high road, and turn up a bridle-path to his left. This he must pursue for a couple of miles up a deeply rutted, uneven road, which had the more lonesome aspect from the dense woodland scenery that abounds in that neighbourhood. But the old man, who was not in the best of humours, began to grow weary of the society of his own thoughts, and was moreover made conscious, by the monitions of an internal clock, that it was time for him to take some refreshment. So, making up his mind on the spur of the moment, he struck sharply round, into the road indicated, and in due course arrived at the homestead he had turned aside to seek. He met not a few labourers on the way, returning home from their daily toil, and after having passed under the avenue of trees, leafless now, which stood in the vicinity of Amos Turner's cottage, was confronted with a spectacle that, for a moment,

made him feel jealous, and miserable, because of another's happiness, and humbler prosperity.

Amos Turner, when we last met with him in these pages, was troubled on account of a debt to Abel Grindstone, which he felt he had no means of paying. It became known to us, notwithstanding, that the debt was paid, and the reader may remember through whose agency that benevolent deed was accomplished.

It will be remembered that this little farmstead, belonging to Turner, adjoined the Littledale Farm, and that if only old Abel could have had his schemes carried out he would at that time have laid his invasive hand upon it.

But he was thwarted, and, as he passed the farm again this evening, on the way to his nephew's, some demon called back to his mind the defeat of his plans in that particular, in a way which was not calculated to rub off the

asperities of his temper. And, just as he passed by, the bowed, but sturdy figure of the farmer, accompanied by two of his boys, was seen making its way up the long strip of garden leading to his house. Some little faces had been watching the three from the window, and the owners of the said little faces now rushed out to greet their elders, with a redness of cheek and a happy ring of laughter, and a stout, sturdy health, and enjoyment of life, which the usurer could not help envying them the possession of; and it disconcerted him not a little when he felt as though a good angel, passing by, whispered in his ears the superiority of youth, and health, and comparative innocence, though poor, to age, and decrepitude, and uneasiness of heart as to the great Eternal future, even though coupled with inexhaustible wealth.

He left his horse in charge of a farm-lad, with whom he met in the stack-yard, and proceeded, by a back way, into the house. There

was no one in the spacious kitchen as he entered, or otherwise his arrival might have been announced; but, as he opened a door, which led out of the kitchen into the hall, he was arrested by the sound of a voice which it caused him a not very pleasant thrill to hear. A few yards off, the door on the left hand side of the passage was ajar, and it was evident that, pre-occupied with their conversation, the persons within were not aware of his arrival. One never learns any good of oneself by eaves-dropping.

“ Well, take my word for it, Frank; the case stands just as I have said. The old boy’s going to get married, and I should recommend you young fellows to look after your own interests.”

Horrible! The “old boy” indeed, eh! He saw no face, but he heard the unmistakeable voice of Dr. Buchanan.

“ H’m, well, it isn’t the wisest thing in the

world for him to do, certainly ; but it's no affair of ours."

"By Jove, Frank, no affair of ours, eh ! I should rather think it was though. It's my decided opinion, of course, that Marion won't have him, but some brazen hussy of a girl will, and she'll contrive to cozen and rob us of half our expectations. Not nice, is it?"

The speaker was Philip Harvey.

"Such an insult to Marion Wilmot would never have been offered, if you had declared yourself long ago," returned Frank, with rising choler. He was ever an irascible individual.

"And a fool I should have been to do it—eh, Buchanan. Do *you* think I'm such a wretch, as Frank makes me out to be, for holding aloof from her ? If I'd ever said a word about love or marriage to her, it would have been a totally different thing ; but what right has a woman to suppose that you're over

head and ears in love with her till you've told her so?"

" You never let even me know that you did not want her for your wife. I could not but think—as others thought—from your going there so often, that there must have been something of that kind astir."

" I don't see it, Frank, I tell you."

" None are so blind as those who won't see. My chance of winning her is gone for ever."

" Well, if you choose to think so, you must. But, after all this bother, how on earth can you tell that Marion is the one to whom that letter was written?"

" Don't shirk your ground, Philip. What has that to do with the other subject?"

" Pooh. It's time the other subject dropped. You have heard from me that I haven't the remotest intention to ask Marion to be Mrs. Philip Harvey; so the coast's clear, and you may go in and win her easily."

“Philip, you will answer for this one day,” shouted Frank.

“Come, come, don’t quarrel—that won’t mend matters,” urged the doctor, soothingly.

“But, Buchanan, I appeal to you. Has not Philip been playing a ‘dog in the manger’ sort of game with me? So long as I felt it would be dishonourable to make an offer to Marion Wilmot, I held aloof from doing so out of consideration for one who I conceived was in the field before me. And now I find, when it’s too late, that I ought to have offered myself long ago.”

“Well, why on earth didn’t you?”

“Buchanan, listen again. Haven’t you heard your wife, and Mrs. Cameron, and Priscilla, and Mrs. Wright, and others speak of Philip and Marion as if they were engaged?”

“Decidedly. Not a doubt about it. It was the general impression.”

Dr. Buchanan spoke calmly and dispassion-

ately,—as one who evidently wished to preserve neutrality in the matter under dispute.

“ Well, drop this matter, Frank. Go in and win. Tell Marion I’m a wretch ; make me out as one of the vilest on the face of the earth. I sha’n’t hear you—bless you—so you can go ahead. Let that be settled. But, I say, Buchanan, I must say I should have liked to be behind your wife, when she read that offer of marriage—he! he! he!”

“ Yes, the old lady was more than a little excited over it, I can tell you. It was the grandest thing in the world to hear her. She took it for granted that your uncle was red hot mad to give her as much money for Mr. Nichols as she wanted ;—that, in short, he meant to give so much, that nobody else need give a shilling. And, between you and me, that ought to be the state of the case. He must see her to-day, he must see her without loss of time ; if it rained cats and dogs he must see her to-morrow, and so on. ‘ Oh,’

she said, 'I shall get a £50 at least, for poor Mr. Nichols.' And then the upshot! It was as good as a play. She began, you know, to drift out to sea a bit, when she came to the reminder that her father was dead. I should rather think he is: it is just about three-and-twenty years ago, at any rate, since we put the old gentleman in his coffin. And then the suggestion that the dear old woman should have someone to take care of her, you know, and so on. I protest I've never laughed more in my life. But when we began to think the thing over, we saw, at once, how it was: that the letters had gone wrong, and I don't doubt you'll find out that Marion has had the other communication. D'ye think there's any chance for poor Nichols out of it all?"

"Hallo!"

At the instant the doctor uttered the aforesaid interjection, a sudden noise had attracted his notice, as though some large tinware

articles had fallen, and then came strange gurgling sounds, and the unmistakeable thump as of a fallen body. In the same instant the cause was discovered. Along the kitchen wall, to the left of the door leading into the hall, there ran a broad settle. On that settle some kitchen functionary had placed a number of dish-covers, and other tin-ware articles, which she had evidently been polishing. The fallen body was that of the poor old usurer, who must have stood up with his grasp on the kitchen door, and his ears wide open, listening to the conversation in the other room, till he felt suddenly faint, and then fell across the settle, disturbing the tinware as he did so.

It was an embarrassing moment for the three, who at once ran to his assistance. All were made suddenly aware of his close proximity to them during a conversation, of which he, and his doings had formed the staple topic. They had canvassed his actions as

freely as if he had at the time been miles away. Philip and Dr. Buchanan, at least, had done this, and even Frank, whose highly honourable nature prompted him to avoid, at all times, the utterance of a word of censure upon the absent, and to stand up actively in their defence wherever he found it possible to do so, remembered that in this instance he had criticized his uncle in no very favourable terms, and felt a corresponding discomfort, and vexation, in the consciousness that he had in all probability overheard him.

After an interval of a few minutes, Dr. Buchanan succeeded in restoring the old man to consciousness. His attack was only a fainting fit, but its occurrence suggested to the doctor its possible connexion with a more serious evil. They procured a lounging-chair and placed him in it, and though he did not at first speak for some few minutes, it was evident that he looked uneasily at the medical practitioner, who had been feeling in his

pocket for his stethoscope, and now held it in his hand. Abel was on his guard at once.

“ Come now, doctor, I don’t want that, thank you. I shall be well again directly. There’s nothing the matter with me. I haven’t paid a fee to a doctor for many a year, and won’t begin to-night.”

Dr. Buchanan’s cheeks flushed, and there was a just perceptible curl of the lip. But he was not going to retract ingloriously from what he conceived to be his plain duty in such a case.

“ If, sir, you persistently refuse to accept such professional assistance as I may be able to render you, under present circumstances, even though I might render them to such an extent as to entitle myself to my fee, the consequences of such rejection must rest with yourself.”

“ Pooh, pooh ! there’s no cause to plague and worry me with physic. It’s expensive,

and I don't want it, and that's an end of the matter."

"If you will simply permit me, when you are a little calmer, to apply this to your chest, the obligation shall be entirely on my own part, and there, if you wish it, my professional interference in your case shall end."

"I tell you there's nothing the matter with me, and why then should I let you take it into your head that there is?"

"I shall be glad if you are right in your opinion."

"H'm! you don't think I am then?"

Abel was beginning to look just a little uneasy. He must have felt that Dr. Buchanan was not the man to persist in pressing professional services, that were not likely to be well received, upon anyone for the mere sake of a fee.

"It is impossible for me to have my opinion confirmed without examination of your chest."

“H’m ! and you won’t charge me anything ?”

“I have said I won’t. I will put you on a level with the poorest of my patients.”

The doctor’s choler was rising. If he had spoken his mind just then he would have added—

“I have an unutterable contempt for you.”

Abel Grindstone offered no further opposition, and after a while the stethoscope was applied. The old man during this operation betrayed not a little uneasiness. Could he, after all, have nothing the matter with him ? Might he not have a hidden enemy within, and, if so, would it not be better to know of its existence ? Might it not even be worth his while to incur a little expense, if he, the possessor of some two hundred thousand pounds, could thereby have held out to him the hope, that his useful life might be prolonged, so that he might acquire thereby from fifty to a hundred thousand more ? The ex-

amination duly came to a close, and the doctor looked up.

“ Well ?”

“ You must take care of yourself, keep yourself calm about everything, have no business cares to disturb you. My advice is that you—that you—rest completely from all the concerns of this life. In short, I must tell you plainly, that you should have nothing to worry or agitate you.”

“ Why ?”

The doctor keenly surveyed his patient’s face, studied his countenance well, and saw that he was perturbed and uneasy.

“ You will allow me to prescribe for you ?”

“ I will ; you won’t be hard upon me ?”

To this last question the doctor vouchsafed no reply. A short time afterwards he had a moment’s conference with Frank.

“ Well, doctor, what do you think of my uncle ?”

“ His days are numbered. Get him off

any matrimonial project. A very little agitation might finish him."

"H'm; you don't say so! What is the matter?"

"He has ossification; a bad form of it."

"Whew."

And Frank looked serious, and walked away.

They could not persuade the wretched old man to sleep at the Littledale Farm that night. "No," said he, in his secret soul—"If I do, I shall have that old Skinner body sitting up, and doing her best to force open my door and rifle my drawers. And Master Philip may steal a march on me, in some way, before I can alter my will. And so I'm not to do as I like with my money, eh! By—we'll see about it."

The old horse, however, did rest at the Littledale Farm that night, for Abel requested that the farm boy, Stukeley, should drive him home.

“ I might not be safe, you know, in the dark with either of those two fellows,” soliloquized he, respecting his nephews, “ and I aint afraid of Stukeley. I wonder why that doctor wouldn’t tell me what ails me. It’s just like him. Wants to make a long bill, I suppose ; but I’ll be a match for him.”

“ There’s bin a tall gentleman after you, sir, while you’ve been away, an’ when I said you were out, he took out a card, and left a bit of a note,” said his housekeeper to him, on his arrival at home.

“ Oh ! who was it ? Where is it ?”

“ Nay, I don’t know’s name, sir. Here’s his card.”

The old usurer took it up, and examined it, by the flaring light that proceeded from half-an-inch of dip-candle, which he had taken out of Rachel’s hand. On the one side of the card he read the words, “ Thomas Wrightson, joiner and cabinet maker,” and on the

other were scribbled in pencil the following lines :—

“ SIR,—

“ I came to give you a bit of my mind ; but we shall meet again. You—with your thousands upon thousands to take and sell up a poor man’s goods ! ‘ How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God ! ’

“ THOMAS WRIGHTSON.”

“ H’m,” he commented, “ savage is he ? Well, that’s *his* look out—*his* fault, not mine. Meet me again, will he ? A big fellow too ! H’m, let’s see ; it won’t do to put myself about. Rachel ?”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Here ! this candle’s beginning to smell. It’s going out. Take it away, and if this tall fellow calls—a dozen times—tell him each time I’m out.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH A QUESTION, CONCERNING GAIN AND LOSS, RECEIVES A PRACTICAL ANSWER.

ABEL GRINDSTONE was a man possessed of little, if any, faith—Divine or human. Each day added to his life, left him more distrustful of his fellow-men, than it had found him. He had, long since, become reconciled to his discovery that he was no object of love, or even of respect, to those with whom he had any acquaintance. He had brought himself to regard this fact with complete indifference.

If it had troubled him at all, there was ample consolation for him in his private counting house, at Icicle Lodge, and in the strong room at his banker's. His treasures did not hate him. In point of health, he was not the same man, after that attack of faintness, on his estate at Littledale, as he had been before it. He had never been made aware of Dr. Buchanan's opinion as to his prospect of a long life, but had felt, for some time, unpleasantly conscious that the dark days were upon him. Still, with what energy he could muster, he plodded on. He would not allow his sense of growing infirmities to hamper or thwart him in his efforts to add, at any cost, to his possessions. He would give himself no time to think of debility and disease. He would toil on to the bitter end—if bitter it was to be. The spirit should have so very much to be intent upon, that the body should be *forced* into its service. He would try what an indomitable will could do towards imparting

strength to Nature's weakened forces against Old Age and Death. He would be brave to the last; no sense of infirmity should be allowed to overcloud his mind, or hinder his action. He might live for years yet, and leave behind him the largest fortune in the county. This was the hope—the ambition that sustained him—the fuel on which the darkening, lowering fire of his life fed, till the earth was bright and beautiful under the reign of leafy June, more than two years afterwards.

Then, during his walk one day in the fresh, balmy air, while tourists were busy scaling the brown side of the mountain, and children were constructing sand-castles and reservoirs on the sea-shore, this old man turned suddenly faint, and fell in the street. It had been a glorious day too for him, according to his own narrow idea as to the meaning of that variously interpreted adjective. He had been at his lawyer's to sign his name to a new

covenant, which promised a very important increase to his wealth, and was hobbling along towards his home, at a pace, which, as he congratulated himself, shewed plainly enough that his day might not yet go down.

Mr. Badger had found him unusually cordial at that interview, and had remarked to Mr. Binks, whom he had not yet admitted into partnership with him, that “the old fellow looked as though he had taken a new lease of life.” He went forth from his lawyer’s doorstep, with his mind full of his leases and his mortgages, his multiplied houses, and his increased heaps of gold, and, without an instant’s warning, lost consciousness, and fell heavily on the pavement. But again he was not unconscious long. He soon became aware, as he lay helplessly in the common pathway, “the observed of all observers,” that there were conflicting sounds, and floating, uncertain, unsteady figures on all sides of him. The public were having their say about him, his condition, and its treatment, which, from

a mere Babel of indistinct and apparently inarticulate sounds, gradually assumed to his ears the distinctness of speech.

“Oh, its old Grindstone :” “Let him lie :” “Pick him up, can’t yer :” “Fetch a cab, and make him pay for it :” “Fetch a doctor :” “Fetch a parson :” “Untie his neckcloth :” “He’s dead :” “No he ain’t ! he’s openin’ his eyes.” “What’s the good of his money now ?”

If the last question had been asked by an indignant individual who had come out the worse for his dealings with him, it could not have had a more bitter emphasis. Abel heard that question very plainly, and it went home to his heart, like the thrust of a dagger. Soon afterwards he was lifted into a cab, and attended home by a policeman, as though he were on his way to prison, or the Asylum ; and a ghastly spectacle he looked, when taken upstairs and laid upon his bed.

For a long time he lay there, just in the position in which they had placed him, help-

lessly still and cold. Rachel Skinner, faithful creature, hovered about him, and fussed, and wept, and wrung her hands, and heaped on more blankets, and poured brandy down his throat : but he lay there as if he noticed her not—pale, and wan, and of trist aspect. Then came the doctor—and last of all, the clergyman : and Abel watched them, as they moved about him, and whispered low to Rachel : but seemed to be stricken with a torpor, that denied to him the power to speak. So he remained till night, and then he could see that his nephews were there—in the sick chamber : and at that time, under the combined effects of the medicine and cordials, he revived a little.

But at this stage, unhappy fancies trooped, in a wild dance, through his brain. It was no longer a matter of doubt to him, that the enemy he most dreaded was on the threshold. He saw around him, what he looked upon in the light of grim preparations, made to give

the tyrant his due reception. In the rising storm of agony within, his want of faith in his kind developed itself in strange exaggerations. In Rachel's stealthy, cat-like step, in the conversations that were carried on in whispers between his nephews, the doctor, and the clergyman, his distorted mental vision read proofs that they were in league together with the foe. On that account the brunt of the battle was one he could ill be expected to bear. If he fell, there would surely be murder laid to their charge. Why those conversations, carried on in an undertone? His brain reeled. The room was full of conspirators, and of daring, impudent thieves. They watched him with an unwonted interest: he saw that: but they were only intent on the division of the spoil among them, so soon as his last breath was gone. To him their cautious whispers were full of treachery. Why was it that Frank and the doctor appeared to be so much together? Had they

poisoned his medicine and his food ? Was he taking, even then, at their hands, in order, professedly, to beat back the forces of the foe, the very means of encouraging his nearer, closer approach ? Should he concentrate his forces on one great effort, and rise, and see what he could find in the larder down stairs ? But the house was full of poisoners, and of poison. His strength was going. He was in pitiable case, and all were against him. They were base hypocrites, pretending to help him against Death, while in reality, they could only desire him gone, that they might be merry together, and divide the prey. Should he bribe them to be faithful to him in this desperate struggle ? No ; they would take his bribe, and continue as they were. During that fatal day his frame lay almost still. His head only moved restlessly, now and again, from side to side. And these were the thoughts and suspicions that filled his mind. Too ill to pay a close, direct attention to anything that was said to him, he was rolling

towards the slippery brink of the precipice, that overhangs an Eternity of Despair, and debating with himself, after a vague, irregular fashion, how he should best compass the one desire to which he still clung—that of life, for the sake of his dear gold. How, even from that slippery edge, he should wriggle his way back into a position whence he could not so plainly see down into the confusing, dreadful chasm, that, as he knew, lay all along at the foot of the beetling cliff of Time, on which he lay prone.

As he lay there, he heard Mr. Nichols, the Vicar of St. Mark's, say something to him about giving up, from that moment, all thoughts concerning the interests of this lower world; but attention to the clergyman's appeals was out of the question; it required an effort of brain of which he was incapable, so that as he looked into the priest's face, he only wondered how much *he* would be likely to rob him of, if the dread battle should go against him. Mr. Nichols thought not of

himself. He pitied, from the depths of his compassionate heart, the fearful case before him. He spoke to his dying parishioner of One Mighty to Save, “to the uttermost, all who would come unto God by Him.” He knelt down and prayed, and all in the room knelt with him. He repeated text after text in the old usurer’s ear, but he saw no sign that the Everlasting Truths, of which he spoke, were recognized, or laid to heart. He noticed only a certain twitching of the nerves of the face, after he had stooped over the patient and whispered some fresh utterance of Holy Writ in his ear, and it struck him that that might proceed only from an unpleasant sensation in the ear, into which he had been breathing. And, as the day wore on, and he saw that all efforts to concentrate his poor parishioner’s mind upon “The Things belonging to his peace,” were altogether vain, he retired from the scene of the dread conflict, sick at heart, as The Monition seemed all at once to flash across his mind—“Ephraim is

joined to his idols: let him alone:” and deeply thankful that God had given to him neither the wealth, nor the hard, stony, impenitent, idolatrous heart of Abel Grindstone.

At nightfall, another figure in black moved about him, and felt his wrist, and narrowly examined his countenance. He was a physician whom he had never seen—Dr. Simpson, summoned from London, to stay, if it might be, the threatened dissolution, by hitting upon some magic herb, or mineral, which should help the poor, old, worn out heart to beat a little longer; but the great man pocketed his three hundred guineas, and left, confirming Dr. Buchanan’s opinion, that Abel Grindstone had reached a climax whence it was not in the power of the whole medical world to recover him.

And then the night came on, and Rachel Skinner alone was with him, except when, at distant intervals, Frank or Philip came in, to make inquiries, from another room. In the darkest part of the night he awoke, after half

an hour's fevered, unrefreshing sleep, and called Rachel Skinner to his bedside.

“Rachel, turn that fellow out.”

“Lor’ bless yer, sir ! turn out who ? There’s nubboddy but me i’ the room now. Do try and get some more sleep if you can.”

“Nobody in the room ! It’s a lie. There’s Wrightson there. Take that upright piece of plank away. It’s reared up at the foot of the bed ; it’s like a coffin top, and he’s standing grinning behind it. Out—out, fellow.”

At this juncture Philip and Frank, hearing their uncle’s voice, came in. In a moment, the past seemed to come in upon him, like a flood, as he caught sight of their faces.

“Oh ! Rachel, run and tell Badger he’s wanted. Get him here at once. I must see to that will of mine. I said it should be altered : and it shall be.”

“Better humour him, Philip. I’ll go for Mr. Badger.”

“Just as you like. It’s of no use.”

But Frank Harvey kept his word, and

Philip once more retired into the adjoining room. Then, gradually, the old man appeared to be falling into a doze—whence, however, after a little while, he awoke, with a start of fear and agony.

“Rachel, turn out that fellow Wrightson. I didn’t want him to go with me to Henry Ashton’s. What brought him in the train with me? Why can’t he put his filthy coffins in the luggage van, and not in the passenger carriages?”

“He ain’t here, sir; an’ you’ve bin in no passenger train, or luggage train ayther. You’re here a-bed. Try and get a bit o’ rest again, there’s a good master.”

“Not been with me in the train! Yes, but he has, I tell you. I saw him with me in that long tunnel. Didn’t he say we should meet again?—and you said you’d keep him out. In the tunnel, I tell you; and he glared at me, and looked as though he were goin’ to strike me, and then said something about ‘gaining the whole world, and losing’ some-

thing. But how am I to gain the whole world, if this cursed illness is to last?"

Rachel Skinner shuddered from head to foot, as she looked into her master's face,—a tender, sad, pitying look.

Then there ensued an interval of apparently complete consciousness, and the old man spoke again, more connectedly this time than was his wont—more like his old self.

"Rachel, can I trust you? Bring me those papers out of my drawers, and tell Badger to send me that covenant to look at; and I should like to count over that largest bag of sovereigns again."

"Never mind 'em now, sir. Throw away all thought about 'em. You've that to think about as is better than what this world's ever given you."

But here the old man was lost again. He bent, on her face, cold, grey, lustreless eyes that seemed to give no indication whatever as to what might be passing in the soul within.

He lay thus no longer than five minutes,

and then there rang through the house, from that bed, a piercing yell, that seemed, on that hot June night, to make the blood freeze in Rachel Skinner's veins. She rushed up to the bed, and looked at his face.

Not a muscle quivered. The eye-balls were still. The lips looked as if they were carved out of stone. There was no movement in the bed-clothes. Rachel looked—looked—put forth the tip of her finger, and felt the eyes, the temples, the face all over ; and then she too uttered a piercing cry, and fell upon her knees.

Philip Harvey had entered, on hearing the first cry, but had kept aloof from the bed. When, however, poor Rachel fell, an instinct of pity led him to run to her assistance.

He raised her, not without difficulty, and placed her in a semi-reclining posture, sprinkling, at the same time, her face with water. She rallied just as Frank returned with Mr. Badger.

But Abel Grindstone was dead.

Had he but lived with that hour in view,

would he have died uttering that ringing cry ?

Worst of fools must that man be, who, during a life time, will persist in hugging to his heart that which perishes in the using, rather than what is quickening and immortal. Surely Death is the sternest, and the truest to his text, of all practical preachers. And, if he does not also carry conviction with him to some natures, is it not because the idolatry of gold is a disease, that acts as a spiritual narcotic, and anæsthetic on those infected with it ; hardening the heart, blunting the conscience, blinding the inner sight, and giving a mental and moral twist to the whole man, whence it is next to impossible for him to grow straight again ? Oh ! when shall the last poisonous root of avarice be dug up and thrown into the unquenchable fire ? Or, still better, when shall it be exposed to the melting, purifying fire of God's tender love, and have all trace of poison extracted from it ? When shall a

man learn to toil for riches ;—not for their own sake,—not that he may spend them chiefly in self-indulgence, or in piling them up, in heaps, to demoralize and unchristianize and bring danger of perdition on his heirs ; but that his may be the humble boast of the patriarch—“ When the ear heard me, then it blessed me ; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me ; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.” Whether is better, the largest fortune in the world, or the lowest seat in heaven ? How will an immortal man think of that wealth which had been a weight about his neck to drag him down to Eternal Doom ? Wherein will lie the honour or the privilege of being rich *there* ?

END OF VOL. I.

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